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MARCH 2000 NO. 37

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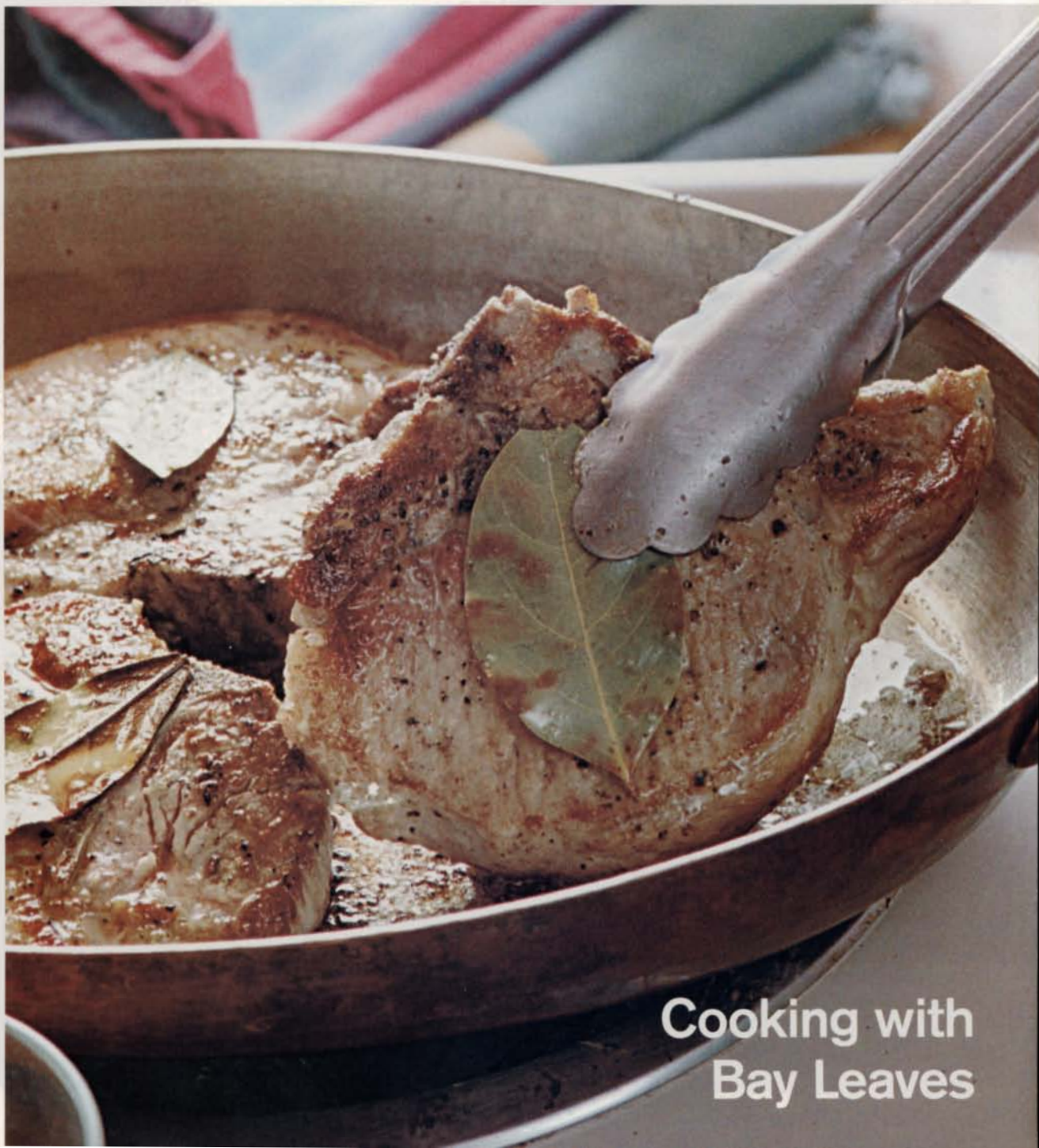
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Add the distinctive flavor of coconut with crunchy toasted shreds or a rich, creamy milk

On the cover: *Pork Chops Marinated with Bay Leaves* p. 52.

Cover photo, Amy Albert.

These pages: top left series, Scott Phillips; above and bottom left, Ben Fink; below, Martha Holmberg.



50 Enjoy the sweet comfort of a pear clafoutis—fresh fruit and a hint of eau de vie baked in a delicate batter.



Since she moved to the United States from her native France in 1960, **Madeleine Kamman** ("Beef Bourguignon," p. 26) has been a passionate teacher and leader of the culinary arts; she has trained and helped launch the careers of many renowned teachers and chefs, including Joanne Weir and Brian

Patterson. Madeleine founded and directed the School for American Chefs, a graduate program for professional chefs at Beringer Vineyards, and has owned and operated three cooking schools and two restaurants. Among her many cookbooks is the comprehensively researched (and recently revised) volume, *The New Making of a Cook: The Art,*

Techniques & Science of Good Cooking (Morrow), which has, in the 29 years since its first printing, become a bible for serious cooks everywhere. In 1997, Madeleine was honored with the James Beard lifetime achievement award. An insatiable scholar, Madeleine has lately eased her teaching schedule to make room for another abiding love, German literature.

Janet Fletcher's passion for fresh food is undeniable ("Broccoli," p. 33). The author of *Fresh from the Farmers' Market* (and eight other cookbooks), she lives, writes, and eats in Napa, California, where she takes full advantage of the bounty of terrific food and wine. When she's not turning in a piece for the *San Francisco Chronicle's* food section, Janet is working on her next book: *The Cheese Course: Enjoying the World's Best Cheeses at Your Table*, which will be published by Chronicle Books in May 2000.



Erica De Mane ("Baked Pastas," p. 42) is a chef, food writer, and cooking teacher who specializes in southern Italian cooking. She lives in New York City and travels to Italy as often as she can. Erica recently published her first cookbook—*Pasta Improvisata: How to Improvise in Classic Italian Style* (Scribner)—to rave reviews.



For **Patricia Yeo**, opening a major new New York restaurant (AZ, featuring Asian-Californian fusion cuisine) is just the latest challenge since trading in a career as a biochemist for chef's whites. Before becoming the executive chef at AZ, she crisscrossed the country working in New York City (for Bobby Flay at Mesa Grill and Bolo) and in San Francisco (for Barbara Tropp at China Moon and Anne Gingress at Hawthorne Lane). While designing her menu for the new restaurant, Patricia found the time to write "Sesame Noodles" (p. 47).

After working for five years as a staff food writer at a daily newspaper in Canada,



Rosa Jackson ("Clafoutis," p. 50) went to Paris in 1994 to give tours of the city's outdoor food markets and to work at the Cordon Bleu cooking school as an interpreter. Rosa still

lives in Paris (understandably), where she works as a food writer and the editor of *TimeOut Paris Eating & Drinking Guide*.

Mohamed Ben Mchabcheb ("Couscous," p. 53) trained at Morocco's prestigious Hotel School Ad-diaffa in Rabat. He spent several years as executive chef of several (non-Moroccan) Chicago restaurants before opening his own, L'Olive, where Chicagoans have been enjoying his inspired French-Moroccan cooking since 1993.



After signing on as the caterer for her sister's wedding, **Sarah Jay** ("Cater Your Own Big Party," p. 58) gained new respect for those who cook for a living. The experience was empowering, exhausting, and thoroughly worthwhile. Although she isn't quite ready to start her own catering business, for a dear friend, she'd do it again in a heartbeat. Sarah joined the *Fine Cooking* family as an associate editor in 1998.

Kay Cabrera ("Coconut Desserts," p. 64) works as a freelance pastry chef in Hawaii. "It's a wonderful change from production work; it allows me to choose interesting assignments while spending more time with my family," says Kay, who was a pastry chef at the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel. A recent project: coming up with a "millennium" dessert for Neil Young and a party of fifty.




Amanda Hesser ("Bay Leaves," p. 38) started cooking and writing during her student days in Boston. Awarded a scholarship from Les Dames d'Escoffier,

she left for Europe after graduation to cook and bake in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France. Amanda spent most of her two years in France at the Château du Fÿy in Burgundy, where she earned a Grand Diplôme from La Varenne cooking school and worked with Anne Willan, the school's founder, as a researcher, recipe tester, and cookbook editor. In 1997, Amanda joined the staff of *The New York Times* as a "Dining In/Dining Out" reporter. She's the author of *The Cook & The Gardener* (Norton).

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Heading for the Hudson Valley

We've returned from our first annual "California Experience"—four days spent with about 100 *Fine Cooking* readers in Sonoma and Napa valleys visiting artisan food and wine producers and taking classes at the Culinary Institute of America's Greystone campus.

After getting over our initial exhaustion (it was an action-packed program), we

heading to New York's Hudson Valley, the source of so many exquisite food products and the home of the original Culinary Institute of America, at Hyde Park.

Join us June 15 to 18 for a three-day program of classes, tours, and tastings. We'll travel in small groups to visit outstanding artisan food producers; we'll watch world-class chefs chop, slice, sear, dice, deglaze, braise, and more; and then we'll put our own chops to the test in a hands-on cooking class in the teaching kitchens of the CIA. All this intensive cooking activity will be deliciously cushioned by dine-arounds, dinners, and wine tastings in the beautiful context of the historic Hudson Valley.

Look for our advertisement on p. 18 to learn how to get a brochure with full program details (or call the HMS Travel Group at 800/367-5348 and say you're from *Fine Cooking*). Space is limited, so call soon.

—The editors

The success of the soup depends on the spoon

An article in *Gourmet* (September, 1999) may shed some light on the white pepper discrepancy in the squash soup in Michael Brisson's Thanksgiving menu (*Fine Cooking* #29, p. 34). Some readers reported that it was the best soup they'd ever eaten; others said it was so peppery that they couldn't eat it.

The article compared several different 1-tablespoon measures and found a big difference when salt was measured by volume (in the spoon) and then weighed. The range was from 9 to 14g. I guess all tablespoons are not

are reinvigorated and more enthusiastic than ever about discovering the keys to great cooking, namely choosing the finest hand-made, locally grown ingredients and cooking them using impeccable technique.

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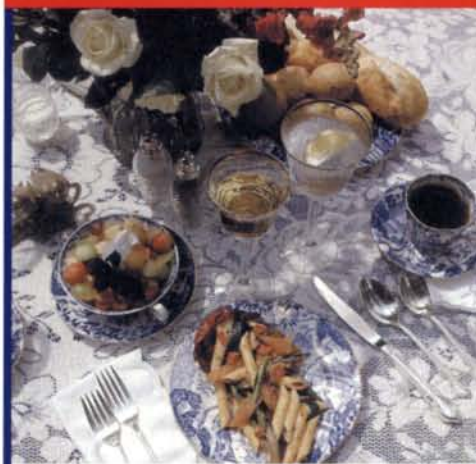
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LETTERS

created equal. Those who loved the soup and those who disliked it were both right.

By the way, I love this magazine. I've cut back on my magazine purchasing, but this one is a must.

—Lisa Hayward,
Toronto, Ontario

Editors' note: For anyone who plans to try this recipe again, we think the soup is delicious, but we recommend starting with 1 *teaspoon* white pepper (not 1 *tablespoon*) and then adding more to taste.

The right candy with the wrong name

Everybody in my family (all southerners) knows Aunt Bill's Brown Candy is the proper name for what you call Mrs. Bruner's Boston Cream Candy (*Fine Cooking* #36, p. 41). No matter what it's called, it is wonderful, but please warn your readers to take great care when making this delicious candy: the cooked sugar is very hot and can burn you badly.

—Linda Worthington,
Gainesville, VA

Is *Fine Cooking* getting chintzy with recipes?

First, I want to commend you for the excellent magazine that is *Fine Cooking*. Recipes, format, clarity, content—all excellent and a good read.

That said, I do have a gripe. In issue #35, there are at least two recipes that call for the use of sauces to go with the respective recipe and the recipes are not given. Rather, the reader is referred to *Fine Cooking's* web site. I think this is a bad marketing idea designed to get the reader hooked into your web site and whatever products may be for sale there. Which is a moot point for me, since I don't have a computer and therefore must do without the recommended web site recipes. I think this tactic is chintzy, certainly not in keeping with the good reputation of Taunton publications.

—Thomas Layne,
Bellingham, WA

Editors' reply: We regret that Mr. Layne was frustrated by the references to caramel sauce for the pumpkin cheesecake and boning instructions for the turkey, but we're glad to have the opportunity to explain our intentions when we direct you to the web site.

In the printed magazine, we have a limited number of pages for each story, which means that sometimes we end up cutting out material that isn't essential to the story but that's valuable nonetheless. Before we had a web site, the extra copy just ended up "on the cutting room floor," and you readers never even knew

what you missed. Now that we have lots of space on the web site, we've decided to post the occasional extra recipe so that those readers who do go on the web can use it as a supplement to the story.

As for directing readers to the site to view products for sale, we don't sell anything on our site aside from subscriptions to *Fine Cooking* and back issues. And there's no adver-

tising, either, so you're "safe" going to our site—it's for information and enjoyment only.

Errata

Some telephone numbers in Sources, *Fine Cooking* #36, were incorrect. The correct numbers are The Grateful Palate, 888/472-5283; Formaggio Kitchen, 888/212-3224; and Zingerman's, 888/636-8162. Our apologies. ♦

Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat to the temperature in the recipe; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the suggested time in the recipe. For meat and poultry, use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ♦ Butter is unsalted.
- ♦ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ♦ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ♦ Sugar is granulated.
- ♦ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ♦ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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Tellicherry peppercorns

What makes Tellicherry peppercorns so different from other varieties of black pepper?

—Tina Nilsen, Burbank, CA

The following answer was composed from two sources, **Thomas Erd** and **Julie Sahni**: Tellicherry peppercorns are grown on the Malabar coast of Southern India, a region whose climate (long, hot summers followed by an intense rainy season) is ideal for producing high-quality pepper. Tellicherry pepper-

same plant, *piper nigrum*. But the Malabar region's distinct climate and soil produces pepper berries with high amounts of the alkaloids piperine and chavericine, which give pepper its bite and fragrance. Those qualities, combined with its larger size and more developed flavor, make Tellicherry a favorite among cooks.

Tellicherry peppercorns fetch a higher price, so beware of impostors. Buy them from a trusted source and judge them by smell as well as by size. Before grinding, the aroma should be clear and distinct, not muddy or mellow.

Thomas Erd is an owner of The Spice House in Evanston, Illinois; Julie Sahni is the author of Classic Indian Cooking (William Morrow).

Wild yeast breads have natural preservatives

Why does bread made with natural leavener seem to stay fresh longer?

—Rika Albriton, Evanston, IL

Shirley O. Corriher replies: You're right that naturally leavened breads don't go stale as quickly as those made with commercial yeast. The reason is that breads made with natural or "wild" yeast are more acidic (a result of the longer fermentation period that the dough starter undergoes). The acidity helps prevent staling, keeping the bread fresh. Raisin breads also have a longer shelf-life due to the propionic acid in the raisins, which kills bacteria and helps control mold. Emulsifiers also retard staling, so adding egg yolks to bread doughs helps keep them fresh. *Shirley Corriher, a food scientist, is the author of the award-winning CookWise (William*

Morrow). She's a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*.

What is confit?

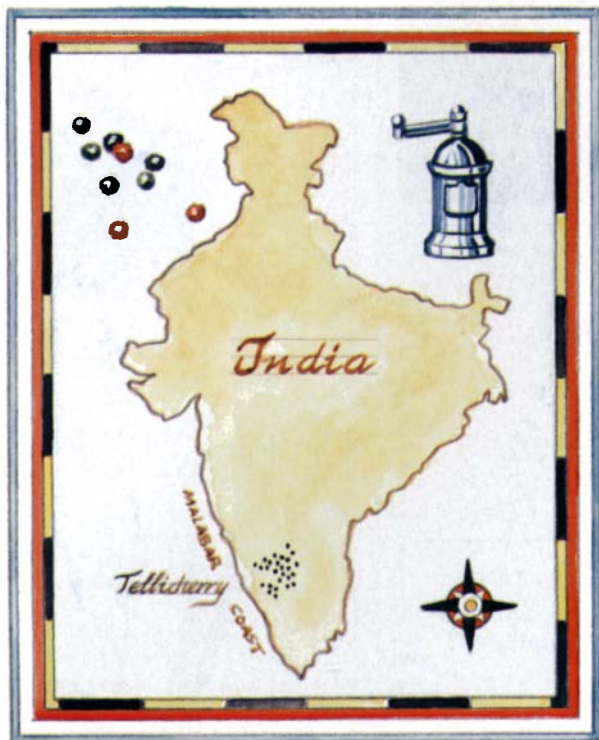
Can you explain the term confit? I always thought it referred to duck, but lately I've seen recipes for tomato confit.

—Billie Liberman, Coral Springs, FL

James Peterson replies: The word *confit* (pronounced kohn-FEE), which is derived from the French verb *confire*, "to preserve," nowadays usually refers to a particular method of cooking or preserving food, or to the preserved food itself. Very simply, to make confit is to submerge a food in fat (it could be duck or goose fat, or another fat, like olive oil) and then cook it at a very gentle heat for a long time. The slow cooking in fat reduces moisture in the food, concentrating its flavors. While the word *confit* is usually linked to duck, goose, and pork (especially in Southwest France, where meat confit is an integral part of the cuisine), it has become somewhat common to see it applied to other food, such as tomatoes, that has been preserved using the technique (see *Fine Cooking* #34 for a tomato confit recipe). I recently ate turnips that had been made into confit by cooking them in melted butter.

Traditionally, confit was stored, still submerged in the cooking fat, in terra cotta or glass jars in the cellar, where they could be left for months, only improving in flavor, but I always store my confit in the refrigerator.

James Peterson's latest book is Essentials of Cooking (Artisan). He is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.



corns (named for the Port of Tellicherry) are really just Malabar peppercorns that have matured longer on the vine and have thus grown larger and more complex in flavor.

Botanically, Tellicherry and Malabar peppercorns are no different from varieties grown in other parts of the world, such as Brazil and Indonesia; they're all berries from the

Combining two kinds of chocolate makes brownies interesting

Why do some brownie recipes use unsweetened chocolate, or a combination of unsweetened and bittersweet? Could I use all bittersweet and just cut back on the sugar?

—Marsha Lukas,
East Northport, NY

Alice Medrich replies: Unsweetened chocolate gives brownies intense chocolate flavor and a fudgy chewiness; bittersweet chocolate contributes smoothness, nuance, and sophistication. Combining the two can give you the best of both worlds.

Originally, brownies were made solely with unsweet-

ened baking chocolate, the predominant form of chocolate (except for cocoa powder) available to American cooks. As more types of chocolate became available, cooks assumed that substituting these “gourmet” bittersweet and semisweet chocolates for unsweetened would make better brownies. What they found was that as satisfying as these bittersweet and semisweet chocolates are for nibbling, they don’t deliver the deep chocolate flavor and chewy texture that we crave in brownies.

Unsweetened chocolate is 100 percent chocolate liquor (ground cocoa beans), while typical bittersweet and semisweet chocolates contain

about half that (or even less). It’s the chocolate liquor that gives brownies and other chocolate desserts their deep flavor. Because unsweetened chocolate contains no sugar, brownie recipes that call for it alone also call for a lot of sugar, which produces chewy brownies. The sugar contained in bittersweet chocolate, on the other hand, is so finely milled for smoothness that it won’t produce that chewy or fudgy texture.

I should note that within the past few years, we’ve seen the chocolate market diversify even more, with the appearance of a newer type of

bittersweet chocolate with much more chocolate liquor (these are labeled 65% or 70%). To me, these are like a cross between standard bittersweet and unsweetened chocolates, and I’ve found that they make spectacular brownies.

Alice Medrich is the author of Cocolat: Extraordinary Chocolate Desserts and Chocolate & The Art of Low-Fat Desserts. Her latest book is Alice Medrich’s Cookies & Brownies (all from Warner Books). ♦



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Winter Is the Time to Rediscover Root Vegetables

As cold weather takes hold in most areas of the country, look to the full flavors of fall-harvested root vegetables. Parsnips, turnips, celeriac, and rutabagas—root vegetables you might be less likely to choose—have a long tradition of adding substance and flavor to all kinds of slow-cooking, hearty dishes. Widely versatile, roots give depth to stews, soups, and casseroles. And they taste great solo, too, whether baked in a gratin, puréed, braised, or roasted.

Most root crops thrive in the short summers of the North and Northeast, where they can finish their growing season in very cool weather. In fact, parsnips and turnips actually taste best after a light frost, which helps turn their starches to sugar.

All root vegetables should feel firm, dense, and quite heavy for their size. Avoid

any that are soft or flabby or that show brown, moist spots, which are signs of rot. The best roots have a good, sweet, earthy smell.

Rutabagas are often dipped in paraffin wax before being shipped and loaded into supermarket display bins to keep them from dehydrating. Before cooking, scrub off any dirt with a brush. Peel off the skins, along with a thin outer layer of flesh, as well as the tops and bottoms.

Plan to cook roots shortly after cleaning and slicing, because their cut surfaces can discolor and develop off flavors if allowed to stand.

Renee Shepherd is a gardening cook and specialty seed retailer. Her company, Renee's Garden, offers gourmet seed packets at independent nurseries. ♦

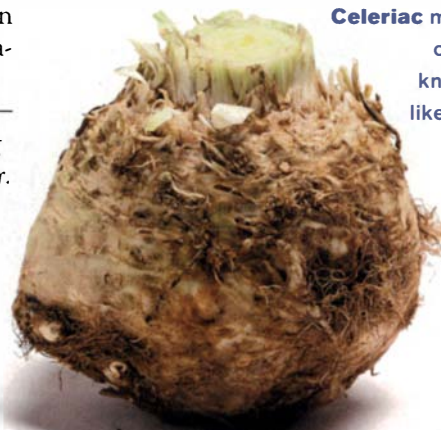
Parsnips can reach almost a foot long. At the market, they should be firm and crisp, never rubbery. Peel their thin skins as you would a carrot's, but only eat parsnips cooked, which turns the flesh moist, sweet, and nutty. Roast, fry, steam, or braise parsnips. I like to braise them in full-flavored chicken broth and then finish them with a sweet-sour balsamic vinegar sauce, or slow-roast them alongside carrots and potatoes with roasted pork, goose, or duck.



Turnips' crunchy flesh really sweetens up in frosty weather, so it's best to buy them only in winter. Look for turnips that feel firm, with crisp flesh. Peel off the skin and on larger turnips, the outer layer of flesh. Mash or purée turnips with potatoes, add them to stews, pickle them, or drizzle them with olive oil and very slowly roast them, which brings out natural sugars, in addition to toning down and evening out any turnipy pungency.



Rutabagas, also known as Swedes or Swedish turnips, are best at about 4 inches in diameter or smaller. Before cooking, peel off their tough waxed skin and outer layer of flesh, and then cut them into chunks. A rutabaga tastes a bit like a turnip but stronger, with a denser texture and a good deal of sweetness. Rutabagas are good in lamb stew with potatoes, onions, and garlic, or steamed and puréed to serve with game like venison.



Celeriac may not be the beauty queen of the produce aisle, but this knobby root tastes deliciously like sweet celery with a texture somewhat like a potato. Celeriac (or celery root) should be firm with no soft spots. Peel off the thick, tough skin with a knife and drop the white-fleshed slices in water with lemon juice to prevent discoloration. For a fine winter salad, grate raw celeriac and toss it with homemade mayon-

naise and Dijon mustard. Add slices to split-pea, bean, or lentil soup for a wonderful soft, sweet celery flavor. Layer slices with Yukon Gold potatoes, cream, and Gruyère for a gratin, or boil with potatoes and mash into a purée.



Presents

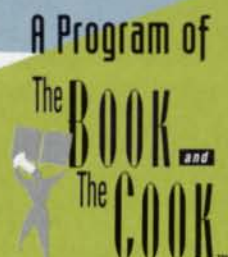
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Don't Miss A Bite!®

How to sharpen knives and keep them sharp

Dull knives are why some people don't like to cook. Chopping, dicing, and carving—satisfying kitchen endeavors when done with a sharp knife—turn into pure tedium with a dull one. And a dull knife, because it needs more force exerted on it, is actually more dangerous than a sharp one.

With few exceptions, most of the knife-sharpening gadgets sold for home cooks do little more than take knives from very dull to just dull. What works best, once you get the hang of it, is periodic sharpening on a whetstone, followed by diligent use of a steel.

A whetstone, also called a sharpening stone, is a rec-

tangular block of abrasive natural or synthetic stone. Whetstones are used for all kinds of knives and woodworking tools and so come in many sizes, a variety of materials, and different levels of coarseness (called grit size). This can make choosing a stone confusing. I recommend starting at a good kitchen shop or restaurant-supply store; it may have a smaller selection than a woodworking store, but the stones will be targeted to kitchen knives. (For woodworkers who already own a stone, knife-sharpening guru Leonard Lee suggests that a 1,000-grit water stone works well for most kitchen cutlery.)



I use a Carborundum stone, the trade name for several synthetic abrasives. It's cheap and does the job well. The one I like has one side that's finer than the other. After a preliminary sharpening on the coarser side, I can make the knife razor-sharp by repeating the same steps on the finer side. (For sources for this stone and others, see p. 76.)

A couple of buying tips:

- ◆ **Get a long stone.** One that's eight inches long makes sharpening larger knives easier.
- ◆ **Consider a water stone.** Before sharpening, a stone is lubricated with either water or

mineral oil to wash away the metal dust that would otherwise clog the abrasive surface of the stone. Both lubricants work equally well, but water is less messy and always available. Just don't switch from one to the other on the same stone or you'll ruin the stone.

Consistency is key

Every cooking professional, hunter, or wood carver has his or her own opinion about the best way to use a whetstone. Some insist the blade be pushed against the stone, others insist it be pulled. Some start with the tip, others with

Using a stone correctly just takes practice



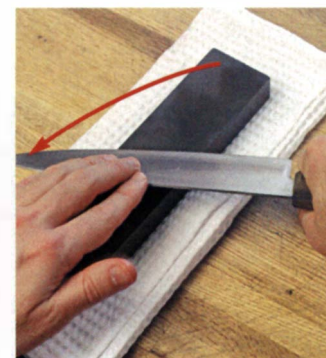
For the tip of the knife, set the stone on a damp towel, position the blade at an angle (15° to 20°) up from the lubricated surface of the stone. Position the fingers of your other hand near the knife's tip.



Push the blade back along the length of the stone while moving the blade across the stone from tip toward the heel, following the blade's arc shape. Stop each swipe when you reach the straighter part of the knife. Repeat about 10 times, picking the knife up off the stone after each stroke.



For the straight part of the blade: hold the knife perpendicular to the stone, and push it away from you, maintaining the same 15° to 20° angle. Be sure the entire heel of the knife is on the stone.



Turn the knife over so that the blade is facing away from you and repeat the arc movements starting from the other end of the stone. This time, pull the blade toward you, maintaining the same angle. Repeat this movement 10 to 20 times. Then sharpen the straight part of the blade, this time pulling it toward you.

Get in the habit of steeling often—it takes only seconds



Position the knife's heel against the tip of the steel so that the knife is pointing slightly upward and the blade is a 20° angle to the steel.



Draw the knife down and across the steel, pulling it from heel to tip, following its arc shape. Ideally, the middle of the knife will cross the middle of the steel.



Continue until the tip crosses the steel just above the guard. Repeat the action with the other side of the blade on the steel's other side. Repeat 3 or 4 times, alternating sides.



For safer steeling, position the steel tip placed on a nonslippery surface. Start with the heel of the knife near the guard. Maintaining a 20° angle, draw the knife down the steel, pulling it toward you, from heel to tip. Repeat the action with the blade against the steel's other side.

the heel. To my knowledge, no single way has been proven most effective. What matters most is consistency.

When you sharpen a knife, sharpen each side to the same degree by holding the knife at a consistent angle against the stone. Don't confuse this angle with the angle at which the two sides of the blade meet, which is called the included angle. For example, if you sharpen a knife at a 20° angle on both sides, the included angle will be 40°. The included angle determines sharpness and durability. A knife sharpened to a narrow 20° included angle (10° against the stone) will cut through food easily, but with so little metal to support it, the edge will wear down quickly. For a chef's knife, which takes a lot of abuse, you need a stronger angle. An included angle between 30° and 45° gives you a good compromise between durability and sharpness. That means the angle you hold the knife to the stone should be 15° to 22½°. Between those degrees, you should choose the angle that

feels the most comfortable because that's the angle you'll be able to hold most consistently.

Follow the shape of the knife. Most knives are gently curved toward the tip. When you sharpen a knife, you should maintain this curve, pushing or pulling the knife along the stone in relation to its arc. I sharpen my large chef's knives in two steps, honing the curved side before moving onto the straight part of the blade near the handle.

As you sharpen, inspect the blade. Run your finger along the side of the blade where you've sharpened it. If the edge of the blade feels rough, you've created what's called a burr. A burr signifies that the edge of the blade has been sharpened sufficiently and in fact has become so thin that the metal is actually beginning to break off. When that happens, stop sharpening that side. If you've sharpened both sides and you finish with a burr, lightly stroke both sides of the knife on the finer side of your stone or run the knife along a steel. Don't use any pressure on the stone at this

stage or you'll continue to break off more metal, creating more burrs.

Steel regularly

If you take care of your knives (store them properly and don't put them in a dishwasher), you only need to sharpen them on a stone two or three times a year. You may need to use a steel—a metal rod with a finely ridged surface—as often as every couple of minutes, so keep it handy.

A steel realigns the edge. Some types of steel actually sharpen knives, but the role of the steel has more traditionally been to realign the knife's edge. As you cut and chop, the edge of the blade begins to curl over microscopically. Proper steeling straightens that curl.

Other sharpening options

If a whetstone seems like too much work, there are other options. Chef'sChoice electric sharpeners make knives much sharper than those I find in most home kitchens. But electric sharpeners can shorten the knife's life by grinding away too much metal.

Manual V-shaped sharpeners have sharpening rods set in a base to help you maintain a consistent angle. Look for kits that allow you to set the rods at different angles.

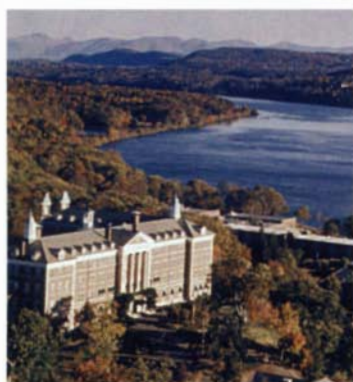
Finally, you can get your knives sharpened professionally. A restaurant-supply or hardware store may sharpen knives or will know where you can send them. Just don't forget to steel them regularly when you get them back.

James Peterson is a contributor editor to Fine Cooking. His latest book is Essentials of Cooking (Artisan). ♦

Want to see this in action?

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Nonskid bases put the brakes on travelling bowls

Do the words “pour in a steady stream, while whisking constantly” give you visions of mixing bowls wobbling across the counter as you try adding ingredients while stirring at the same time? If so, you’ll be as thrilled as I was to discover that someone has come up with the solution for the solitary cook with only two hands. These graduated nonslip mixing bowls are top-quality heavy-duty brushed stainless steel and feature a thick rubberized footing that firmly grips the counter, so your hands are free to stir, pour, whisk, and fold.

The 2- and 4-quart bowls are ideal when tempering eggs for custards and emulsified sauces such as mayonnaise, which depend on judicious pouring along with simultaneous whisking. The 8- and 12-quart bowls are marvelous for sponge cake batters, whose loft and lightness require that one hand sift dry ingredients over the batter, while the other deftly does the folding.

A three-piece set of the dishwasher-safe bowls (2-, 4-, and 6-quart) is available for \$39.95 from the Kitchen and Home catalog (800/414-5544) or from www.kitchenandhome.com. The company also carries the 8- and 12-quart bowls (\$29.95 and \$34.95). You can also find the bowls in Sur La Table stores or by calling 800/243-0852. The bowls are not currently pictured in the catalog, but Sur La Table has the 2-, 4-, and 6-quart in stock.

—David Lebovitz, author of *Room for Dessert* (HarperCollins)



Traditionally made foods from Zingerman's web site

One of our favorite sources for balsamic vinegar, olive oil, artisan bread, farmhouse cheeses, and many other wonderful things to cook with has gone online. Zingerman's started out as a corner deli in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 17 years ago and has developed an informed, fun-to-read catalog of only top-quality traditionally made foods. Now the look, the hard-to-resist attitude, and the products can all be found at www.zingermans.com. Try clicking on “edible add-ables,” where you’ll find “stuff your pantry would be naked without,” including two of our favorite imported Italian

pastas, Rustichella and Martelli brands (spaghetti, fettuccine, maccheroni, and penne are all \$5 to \$6 per pound). Made from hard durum wheat and extruded through old-fashioned bronze dies, these pastas have a nice hearty flavor and a firm but slightly rough texture that helps sauces cling. They also stand up well in baked pasta recipes (see “Baked Pastas,” p. 42). Zingerman's usual method of shipping is FedEx two-day because many of its offerings are perishable; ask about shipping nonperishables by post, which is less costly.

—Susie Middleton, associate editor, *Fine Cooking*



Pistachio oil is rich, round, and delicious

I've long enjoyed using walnut, hazelnut, and almond oils for the depth and intensity they deliver. Recently I found another nut oil that offers great flavor, and versatility, too. California Press's Pistachio Oil is a first-pressed nut oil that packs rich, round pistachio flavor (the pistachios—whole and halves only—are gently toasted before pressing). Drizzle the oil over goat cheese or garlic toast, or over grilled vegetables or seafood. Use it for dunking bread, for flavoring marinades, and in vinaigrettes, especially those destined for hardy, bitter greens.

Matching wine with salads is often tough, but including this pistachio oil in a vinaigrette (I like to temper its intensity with a neutral oil like canola) allows the toasty, nutty flavors of an aged Chardonnay to sing with salad instead of clash with it. A 250ml bottle costs about \$20, plus shipping. To order, call The California Press at 707/944-0343. —Amy Albert, associate editor, *Fine Cooking*

The web gets wider

At long last, two kitchen catalog giants have their web sites up and running: For pots and pans, bakeware, knives, specialty foods, and tableware, you can now visit www.williams-sonoma.com and www.surlatable.com to shop even if you've lost your catalog or can't make it to a store.

Scharffen Berger natural cocoa packs big chocolate flavor

Scharffen Berger, maker of premium chocolate, now makes cocoa powder using the same blend of beans as its chocolate. The deep flavor is apparent even when you taste the cocoa by itself.

While Scharffen Berger cocoa isn't "Dutched" (alkalized to reduce harshness for a more mellow result), it still has the sophistication of an alkalized cocoa, while packing the big chocolate flavor of nonalkalized ("natural") cocoa. Scharffen Berger uses fermented beans to make the cocoa powder, which not only seems to make alkalizing unnecessary, but also lets the

cocoa retain more of the beans' original character.

I tried Scharffen Berger cocoa alongside supermarket brands in brownie and cookie recipes; those made with Scharffen Berger had a rounder, more intense flavor.

But this cocoa really shines in simple recipes where cocoa is the star and there's minimal cooking required. That's when you'll really taste the difference: in chocolate sauce (the recipe in the package is one of the best chocolate things I've ever tasted, and it doubles as a frosting), in hot cocoa, in frozen drinks, and for



dusting truffles. A 6-ounce tin is about \$8. To order, visit www.scharffen-berger.com or call 800/930-4528. (By phone the minimum order is two 6-ounce tins; on the web site, no minimum.) —Amy Albert

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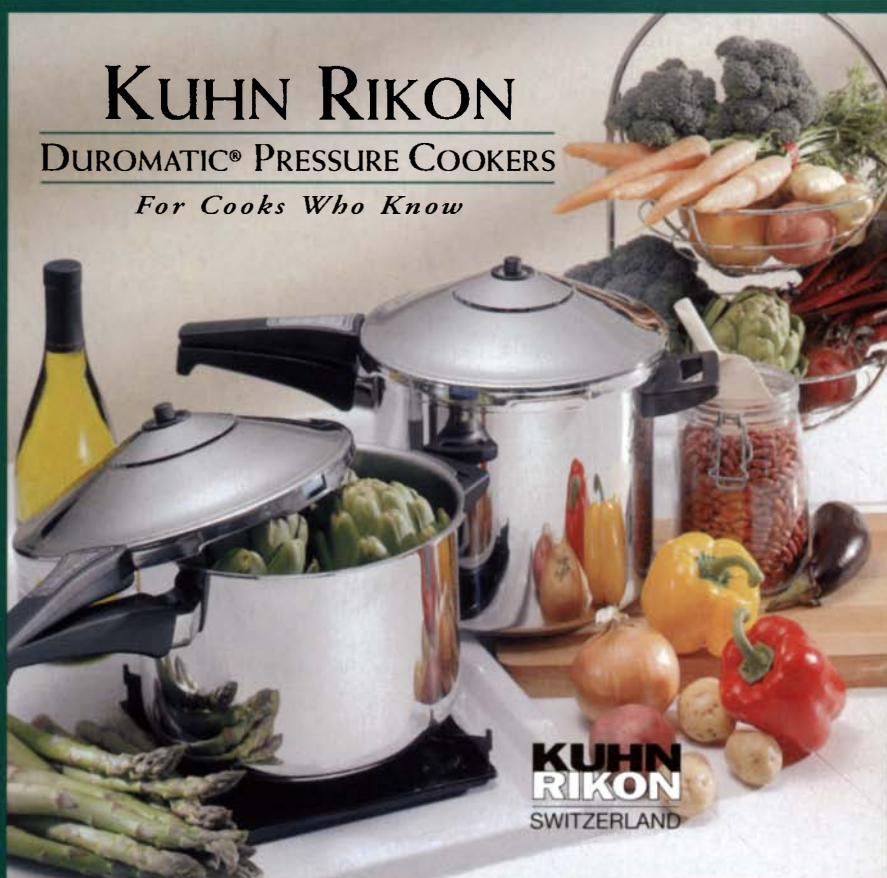
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READER SERVICE NO. 59

Do you have a better way to clean fresh greens, a neat trick for handling sticky bread dough, or a new way to use an old kitchen tool? Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.

Bottle brush cleans cookie cutters

I have a lot of intricately shaped cookie cutters. I used to struggle with a sponge to dislodge cookie dough from the cutters' many nooks and corners, but now I use a bottle brush to clean them.

—Rose Barvenik,
Trumbull, CT

Put the date on spices to know when to replace them

I write the date on a jar or bag of spices when I first buy it, so I can easily gauge its freshness. After six months to a year, most spices have lost so much potency that they should be replaced.

—Richard Forgash,
Seattle, WA



Mark the date on your spice jars when you buy them so you'll know when to replace them.

Milk cartons are good freezing containers

I use empty milk cartons to freeze stocks and soups. Thoroughly washed, they make excellent freezing containers. Use strong tape to close up the spout and store the cartons standing up, if possible (at least until the contents freeze). The cartons expand in the freezer without cracking or pushing off the lid, and the outside can be peeled away to expose the contents for quick thawing.

—Deborah Easson,
Utterson, Ontario



Singe a mark on your wooden spoons to differentiate those used for savory foods from those for sweets.

"Brand" wooden spoons as sweet or savory

I like to keep my wooden spoons segregated—those for sweet things separate from those for savory foods. In order to tell them apart, I "brand" the handles of the savory spoons in the flame of my gas burner. It takes but a few seconds and makes them forever identifiable.

—Maggie Carter,
Sowney, CA

Use the sharp "heel" of the knife

In a perfect world, your knife would always be sharp. But when faced with a dull knife, use the part of the blade closest to the handle. Because it sees less use, it will be sharper than the middle of the blade, which gets more of a workout.

—Eric Reinfelder,
Topsham, ME

Drain fried foods in a sieve

When I deep-fry potatoes, they turn out crisper if I let them drain in a sieve set over a bowl rather than on a paper-towel-lined plate. They also cool faster. I now use this

method of draining for any deep-fried food.

—Ines Carvalho de Azevedo,
Campinas, Brazil

Rubber gloves help open stubborn jars

My dishwashing gloves do more than just protect my hands during cleanup. Their rubbery, textured surface



Dishwashing gloves give the grip you need to open jars.

helps me get a grip on tight jar lids. And I also don a clean pair when mixing up cold ground meat to make meatballs, burgers, or meatloaf.

—Alan Pelikan, Summit, NJ

(Continued)

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She Turned Her Passion For Cooking Into A Profitable Business!

Have utensils, will travel could be Susan Titcomb's motto. Twelve years ago, Titcomb, a 39 year old mother from San Diego, California, had a passion for cooking and a desire to control her own destiny. Armed with an idea, her husband's support, very little capital and virtually no business experience, she started the country's first personal chef service. Personally Yours Personal Chef Service became an overnight success and spurred her on to become a cofounder of the United States Personal Chef Association. "A personal chef can make \$35,000 to \$50,000 a year, depending upon the hours worked and the number of clients," says Titcomb. Since most clients work

full-time, Titcomb goes into their home and cooks 10 meals for the whole family. Her service includes grocery shopping, preparation, cooking, packaging and cleanup. With a cost as low as \$8 per meal, per person, Titcomb has a long waiting list. So what does it take to become a personal chef? "Organization, persistence, a love of cooking and a little know how," says Titcomb. *For more information, call the United States Personal Chef Association at: 1-800-995-2138 or go to <http://www.uspca.com>.*



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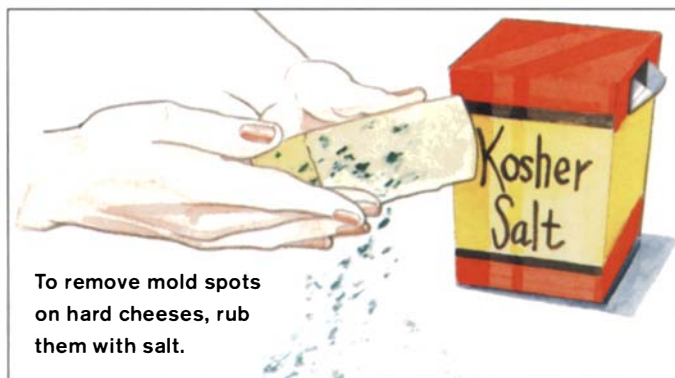


READER SERVICE NO. 76

Salt removes mold from hard cheeses

If mold starts to appear on the surface of any hard cheese, such as Parmesan, aged Cheddar, or Dry Jack, there's no need to trim away the mold. Just rub salt on that section and the mold rubs right off.

—Ig Vella,
Vella Cheese, Sonoma, CA



To remove mold spots on hard cheeses, rub them with salt.

A quick meringue-style frosting for cakes

Here's a flavorful cake frosting made with ingredients likely already in your fridge: egg whites and jam. In a double boiler over simmering water, beat a cup and a half of jam (or marmalade, or a mix) with three large egg whites on high speed until the mixture holds its shape when the beaters are lifted, about 10 minutes. Use this meringue-style frosting

immediately. (It makes more than enough for a 9x13-inch sheet cake or a round two-layer cake.) Keep the cake at a temperature cooler than room temperature (but don't refrigerate it) and serve it within a few hours. By experimenting with different jams, you'll get a different flavor—and color—every time.

—Melissa Wales,
Rockville, MD

Use scissors to cut chicken into stir-fry strips

I use scissors to cut the fat off chicken and to slice the meat into thin strips for stir-fries. I find that I waste less and have better control over the thickness of the slices. I also use scissors to cut herbs—not just chives, but also basil and parsley.

—Kathy Slavics,
Eden Prairie, MN

Add a crank handle to your pepper grinder

I turned my rotary twist-top pepper mill into one with a crank handle by screwing a small "J" hook from the hardware store into the side of the top. The added handle lets me grind a lot of pepper with a rotary motion in seconds rather than the slow, wrist-twisting method the old way.

—Lane Johnson, Portland, OR

Waxed paper prevents skin on cream sauces

After I make a béchamel sauce or any other thick cream sauce that I'm not going to use immediately, I lay a piece of waxed paper on the surface to prevent a skin from forming. This also works well for storing leftover cream soups.

—Samantha Kwan,
Arlington, VA ♦

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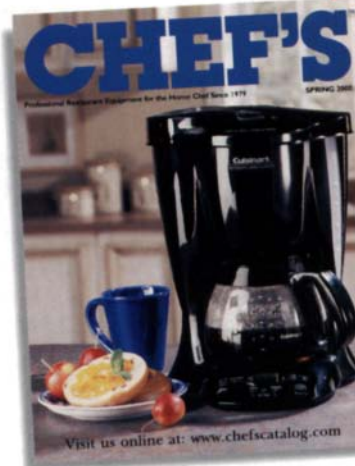
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READER SERVICE NO. 88

Convert your modern pot into an old-fashioned braising vessel to ensure succulent, tender meat and a concentrated sauce

Beef

BY MADELEINE KAMMAN



Sumptuous fare. Beef braised in red wine gets better with each reheating.

When well-executed, beef Bourguignon is a truly glorious dish, perfect as the centerpiece of a dinner among friends. The concept is simple: beef is marinated overnight in red wine and aromatic vegetables and then braised in the oven with the marinade, stock, and vegetables until the meat is succulent and tender. About 15 minutes before serving, garnishes of tiny onions, mushrooms, and bacon are added to the beef and to the robust mahogany sauce created during the cooking.

The techniques that govern the preparation of this dish do involve a few extra steps (for example, the wine is reduced before marinating the meat; the stewing pot must be prepared correctly), but these are the details that ensure moist meat and a rich sauce, the signature of a superior Bourguignon. Familiarize yourself with my techniques and the rationales behind them, and your braise will have no rivals.

Also, please don't be discouraged by what at first glance seems a time-consuming recipe. The length is largely due to the many descriptive details I've included to help you along the way, not to any formidable or labor-intensive tasks. There is nothing about the method that even a novice cook should have trouble performing, even the very first time. And as with any braise, the whole recipe can be prepared a few days ahead of time and carefully reheated just before serving, which is another reason that it's an excellent choice for a special winter dinner party.

The shape of the pot made all the difference

I learned to cook in France during the German occupation, a time when food and gas shortages forced many households to return to cooking on the hearth. On the rare occasion when my mother made beef stew, she used a thick old copper pot called a *braiseïre* (or *brazier*), which sported two lids, one deep and concave, the second more decorative. She filled the pot with seared meat, aromatics, stock, and wine, and fitted the concave lid inside so it rested just a hair above the ingredients in the pot. The pot was then nestled into a bank of smoldering coals, known as *braises*, and the concave lid was filled with more coals (later on, when we had a gas stove, we

Bourguignon

filled the lid with boiling water). Then the second lid was set on top.

In the moist atmosphere of the brazier, the seared meat would soon lose its inner juices to the stock and wine. But as the cooking continued, the meat juices, stock, and wine slowly penetrated back into the fibers of the meat. Beef that had been so braised always had a shiny and very moist appearance when sliced.

When I started to cook in my own home in the U.S., my attempts to produce such a rich braise were frustrating: I got tough, stringy meat and a thin, watery sauce. I finally figured out that the only way to get a good braise was to modify my modern stewing pot to make it act more like the old brazier of my childhood. To do this, you need the following items:

- ◆ **A heavy so-called stewing pot or *cocotte***, made of enameled cast iron, heavy stainless steel, or another heavy nonreactive metal. What is important is the heavy material, not the shape of the pot, which can be round, oval, or oblong. This recipe serves a crowd, so if the pot isn't at least 7 quarts, divide the braise between two smaller pots.

- ◆ **Heavy-duty aluminum foil to make an inverted lid for the pot.** See the photos on p. 28. If you don't have heavy-duty foil, use two sheets of regular foil. While the braising takes place in a 325°F oven, the upside-down foil lid will catch any condensation that might squeeze between the pot sides and the foil, thus preventing it from diluting your good sauce.

- ◆ **Parchment cut to fit inside the braising pot.** The parchment will be set directly on the surface of the braise, below the aluminum foil, and will prevent the acid in the wine from reacting with the foil.

Reduced wine and the right cut of beef are key

In the old days, we larded our beef with seasoned pork fat back to prevent it from being dry after being braised. There is no longer a need for this, as long as you choose a cut with either a lot of collagen, such as the blade roast, or one with visible marbling.

The best cut is the blade roast, braised whole, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thick steaks (called blade steaks), or cubed. Remove any traces of fat visible around the meat, as well as the underlying bluish-white mem-



Reduced wine makes a better marinade, full-flavored without being “winy.”



Drying the meat means better browning, which ultimately gives more flavor to the sauce.



Sautéing the aromatics until softened releases their flavors.

Improvise an old-fashioned Brazier

1. Set the lid of the braising pot on a sheet of parchment. Trace the shape of the lid on the paper with a pencil. Cut out the pattern $\frac{1}{3}$ inch wider than the template.



2. Lay two or three sheets of wide, heavy-duty foil on the counter, dull side up, so the sheets overlap by at least 2 inches. They should form a large square for a round pot and a large rectangle for an oval or oblong pot. Set the pot on the foil; the amount of foil that extends from under the pot on all sides should be a couple of inches more than the height of the pan. If not, add more foil. Tape the sheets together.



3. Set the empty pot in the center of the sheet and wrap the foil up and around the sides of the pot, molding it to form a well-defined angle where the bottom meets the sides. Flatten the foil well against the sides.



4. Once the meat, aromatic vegetables, and strained wine marinade are in the pot, set the parchment over them (pencil marks facing up), and then insert the prepared foil



over the parchment, adjusting as needed to fit tightly all around the pot. Fold down the foil so it hugs the pot's outer walls; trim the excess with scissors.

brane, called the silverskin, if the butcher hasn't already done so. Whether you use a whole roast, steaks, or cubes, don't remove the white band of collagenic tissue that runs through the center of the cut from end to end. It will turn to soft gelatin during the long cooking and give the meat a very pleasant and soft texture.

Another good choice is chuck. Cut the meat into $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes, removing only larger blocks of fat or tough membranes. For this cut, it is the marbling fat that keeps the meat moist during cooking. If there is a bone in the piece, brown it and add it to the braise.

Before letting the meat marinate in the wine and aromatics, you'll simmer the wine for 15 to 20 minutes with some aromatics and cool it completely. This simmering step allows most of the alcohol to evaporate so that the meat taste remains integral without taking on that slightly unpleasant "winy" flavor so noticeable in the stew meat that has been marinated in raw wine.

The stock or broth for the braise must be meaty and robust. It is traditionally made with veal; the best cuts are meaty pieces of veal neck, the thinnest



The secret ingredient. Pork rind, scraped of fat, gives this beef braise its voluptuous sauce.

end of the breast, or the bonier ends of shanks (use any basic veal stock recipe, or my recipe, which you can find on *Fine Cooking's* web site, www.finecooking.com). Beef stock is less traditional but quite acceptable. You can also make a good stock with large turkey legs, adding a blanched veal knuckle or two blanched ends of veal shank to the pot.

I wouldn't say that I endorse canned broth, but if you can't get around to making your own, use a low-salt broth and always taste before adding more salt.

Three ingredients that make or break the dish

As you review the recipe, a few ingredients may strike you as odd. I'll explain them.

♦ **Pork rinds from ham hocks.** These are simmered, cut in pieces, and set in the bottom of the braising pot. The rind is mostly protein, which melts during the long, slow cooking and gives the sauce its luxuriant body and shine. You'll probably need to buy whole ham hocks (either fresh or smoked) and remove the rind yourself after simmering. You can freeze the meat and bone and use it in a pasta or bean dish.

♦ **Beef bouillon cubes.** I use 1½ cubes of beef bouillon for its salt content and for the trace amount of monosodium glutamate it contains, which rounds up the flavor of the sauce.

♦ **No tomato products.** It's not uncommon for braise recipes to include tomatoes, but mine does not. Both fresh and canned tomatoes contain acids. When a stock or sauce with tomatoes reduces, the acidity increases. The high acidity can break down meat gelatin, which results in a watery sauce that slides off the meat onto the bottom of the plate. If you try to correct with a flour or cornstarch thickener, the acid wreaks the same damage on the starch.

For the garnishes: slab bacon, tiny onions, and button mushrooms

While the beef is braising, you'll prepare what we call the garnishes, though don't be misled by the term: these are not plate adornments but rather integral parts of the dish. The garnishes are mushrooms, onions, and, traditionally, fresh pork brisket, cut into short, thin strips, called lardoons. Since pork brisket is close to impossible to get in this country, I use the best slab bacon I can find, blanching it (starting in cold water) to remove some of the smokiness. The lardoons of bacon should be cooked to be as golden as possible all around, but never crisp to the core.

The onions should be the regular small white pearl onions sold at any good market. If you can't find them, use the smallest onions available, peeled of their outer layers to shrink their size. Sweet small red onions are not desirable. The mushrooms should preferably be button mushrooms, either white or cremini. Otherwise, quarter larger mushrooms.

Thickening and finishing the sauce. If you like the texture of the sauce as it is straight out of the pot, you may leave it as is. Most likely, however, you'll want to thicken it slightly, which is easily done with a butter-flour paste, called a *beurre manié*. Keep in mind while thickening that a brown sauce will always be somewhat thin (though it shouldn't be watery) and should never acquire the thickish texture of a medium white sauce. As a final rounding touch to the sauce, I sometimes add an ounce of Cognac when deglazing the garnish pan with the braising sauce.

Beef Bourguignon begs to be served with a starchy side dish that will soak up the sauce. One of my favorites is spaetzle (see p. 31). The braise is also wonderful served over egg noodles lavished with butter.



"There should be no condensation on the foil lid," says Madeleine Kamman. "But if there is, just dab it away with a paper towel before lifting the foil."



Pressing on the vegetable solids during straining extracts as much liquid—and flavor—as possible.



A final strain of the defatted sauce removes protein particles that coagulated during the reduction—no pressing this time.

Beef Bourguignon

Plan to start the preparations early one evening and finish the braise the next morning. It can be completely prepared up to three days ahead, allowed to cool, and refrigerated. To serve, reheat gently but thoroughly to at least 165°F, and let simmer while preparing the croutons. *Serves eight to ten.*

FOR MARINATING THE BEEF:

- 2 bottles full-bodied red wine (see the box on p. 32)
- 2 shallots, finely chopped (½ cup)
- 2 large yellow onions, thinly sliced
- 1 medium carrot, peeled and thinly sliced
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme or ½ tsp. dried thyme leaves
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 Tbs. roughly chopped parsley stems
- ¼ tsp. ground allspice
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground nutmeg
- ⅛ tsp. ground cloves
- 6 lb. beef blade roast or beef chuck, trimmed of all external fat and cut in 1½-inch cubes
- 3 Tbs. olive oil

FOR THE BRAISE:

- 2 ham hocks, fresh or smoked
- Coarse salt
- 3 Tbs. olive oil; more as needed
- Stems from 1½ lb. button mushrooms, caps reserved for the garnish
- 6 to 8 cups veal or turkey leg stock (see my recipe on www.finecooking.com) or beef stock
- 1 *bouquet garni* of 10 parsley stems, 1 sprig thyme (or ¼ tsp. thyme leaves), and 1 bay leaf
- 2 large cloves garlic, crushed and coarsely chopped
- 1½ cubes beef bouillon, crumbled
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Prepared parchment and foil lid (see photos, p. 28)

FOR THE GARNISHES:

- 12 oz. lean, meaty slab bacon, top layer of fat removed and fatty ends trimmed
- 6 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 36 small white onions
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 Tbs. stock or water
- Reserved button mushroom caps (or larger mushrooms, quartered)

FOR THICKENING THE SAUCE:

- About 4 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature
- About 4 Tbs. all-purpose flour
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR SERVING:

- 5 slices (⅓ inch thick) country French *boule*, cut in half, a crustless triangle cut from each half
- About ½ cup olive oil
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley; plus more whole leaves for garnish

To make the marinade—Empty the wine into a large nonreactive saucepan, add the shallots, and slowly bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook until reduced to 1 qt., about 20 min. Cool completely.

In a bowl, toss together the onions, carrot, thyme, bay leaf, and parsley stems. Spread half of this mixture on the bottom of a nonreactive baking dish.

Mix the allspice, nutmeg, and cloves in a small dish. Sprinkle the cubes of beef with the spices and then



Sautéing the mushrooms, onions, and bacon separately until they're golden brown means each garnish will be cooked to the right degree.



Deglazing the garnish-cooking skillet with defatted braising sauce captures all the cooked-on juices.

toss with the olive oil. Arrange the meat on top of the aromatics in the baking dish and then cover with the remaining aromatics. Pour the cooled reduced wine over everything, using your fingers to make room between the meat for the wine to enter (don't toss yet). The wine should just cover the meat. Cover with plastic wrap and punch a few holes in the plastic (so sulfur gas from the onions can escape). Refrigerate and marinate for 3 hours. Toss the contents, cover again with the plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight, or for at least 8 hours.

To prepare the braise—The next morning, cover the ham hocks with cold water in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil with a dash of salt and simmer until softened, about 45 min. Meanwhile, drain the marinated meat and aromatics in a colander set over a bowl (reserve the marinade). Remove the beef cubes, dry them thoroughly (I roll them in an old, clean dishtowel, but paper towels are fine), and set aside. Pat dry the aromatic vegetables. When the hocks are soft, drain them and cut or pull off the rinds. Scrape the rinds of all extra fat. Cut the rinds into 1-inch squares; set aside.

In a large skillet, heat the olive oil on medium high. Salt the pieces of beef lightly and sear them in batches until browned on all sides, 3 to 5 min., adjusting the heat so the meat doesn't burn. Transfer to a plate.

In the oil left in the skillet, add the drained aromatic vegetables and the mushroom stems. Sauté on medium high, stirring often, until the vegetables cook down and soften, about 10 min. Remove from the heat and transfer the vegetables to a plate. Sop up excess oil in the pan with a wad of paper towels. Add a cup of stock to the skillet and scrape up the caramelized juices. Pour the deglazed juices into the braising pot.

Heat the oven to 325°F. Add the reduced wine marinade to the deglazed skillet (or a saucepan, if the skillet is too small) and bring to a boil, letting the liquid reduce by one-third. Strain the marinade through a fine mesh strainer directly into the braising pot.

Add the reserved pieces of rind to the braising pot, along with the browned meat and vegetables, *bouquet garni*, garlic, bouillon cubes, and pepper. Pour in enough stock to just cover the meat. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer. Lay the parchment and the foil lid inside, following the photos on p. 28. Cover with the pot lid and bake until the meat is extremely tender and a metal skewer penetrates a piece of meat and comes out without resistance (a meat thermometer should read at least 165°F), 2 to 2¾ hours.

To prepare the garnishes—While the beef is in the oven, cut the bacon into strips ⅓ inch thick, and then cut across the strips to create ⅓-inch thick slices, called lardoons. (If you put the bacon in the freezer for 15 to 20 min., it will be easier to cut.) Cover the lardoons with cold water in a saucepan, bring to a boil and simmer for 2 to 3 min. to remove the smoky flavor and some saltiness. Drain well and pat dry. Heat 2 Tbs. of the butter in a large skillet over medium heat and brown the lardoons on all sides until they're golden but not crisp or brittle, 12 to 15 min. Transfer the lardoons to a paper-towel-lined plate. Discard the fat in the pan but leave the caramelized juices.

While the lardoons are browning, bring about 1 qt. of water to a boil. Add the onions, simmer for 1 min., and turn off the heat. Remove a few onions. When

How to make Spaetzle

The technique of scraping the spaetzle batter into the pot produces ragged-looking dumplings, exactly what you want for this homey dish. You can vary the recipe by omitting the garlic and parsley or by substituting half the all-purpose flour with fine semolina flour, if you want. Serves nine to twelve.

3 cups all-purpose flour; more as needed

9 large eggs, well beaten

1 cup milk

3 cloves garlic, mashed to a paste or finely minced

½ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 tsp. coarse salt; more to taste

Heaping ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more to taste

8 Tbs. unsalted butter; more as needed

In a medium bowl, beat the flour, eggs, and milk with a wooden spoon until smooth. Add the garlic, parsley, salt, and pepper. Stir well to develop some gluten. The mixture should be thick enough to spread on a cutting board without dripping, somewhat like a very thick pancake batter. If it's too thin, add more flour. If it's too thick, stir in more milk. Let stand 15 min.

Bring a large stockpot filled with water to a boil, add salt, and lower the heat to just under a simmer (few, if any, bubbles should appear on the bottom of the pan, and none should break the surface of the water). Set a saucepan on low with the butter.

Using a metal spatula or a long knife, spread some of the batter ¼ inch thick on a small chopping board or the bottom of a cake pan or baking sheet. Shave off ribbons of batter about ⅜-inch wide into the water. The spaetzle will sink to



the bottom. When they float to the surface, after about 1 min., they're done. If they don't float to the top, give them a nudge with a spider or a large, round, slotted spoon. Gather them up



with the spoon and let the water drain quickly, and then deposit them into the saucepan with the melted butter. Continue shaving off more batter into the water and cooking in



batches until all the batter is cooked. Toss the spaetzle in the butter, season with salt and pepper if necessary, and serve. You can also turn up the heat on the saucepan to develop some browning on the spaetzle.

Thicken the sauce by whisking in small flecks of a butter-flour paste until it has a pleasantly silky texture.



they're cool enough to handle, cut off the root end, slip off the skin, and cut a 1/8-inch-deep cross in the root end to prevent the onions from falling apart during cooking. Repeat with the remaining onions.

Add another 2 Tbs. butter to the pan with the caramelized bacon juices and sauté the onions on medium heat until they're golden brown, about 10 min. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Add 2 Tbs. stock or water to the pan, and roll the onions in the forming glaze. Transfer them to the plate with the lardoons.

Without cleaning the pan, melt the remaining 2 Tbs. butter and sauté the reserved mushroom caps (or quarters) on medium-high heat until they begin to brown, about 2 min. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover the pan, turn the heat to medium low, and cook until the mushrooms have given off all their liquid, about 5 min. Turn the heat to medium high, uncover the pan, and cook until the liquid concentrates again and the mushrooms turn shiny, about 5 min. Transfer them to the plate with the onions and lardoons.

Set aside the skillet, but don't clean it (if there are black or burned bits in the pan, remove them).

To thicken the sauce and finish the braise—

Using a slotted spoon, transfer the pieces of meat from the braising pot to a bowl. Strain the sauce that remains through a fine strainer into a bowl, pressing on

the solids. Let stand until the fat has completely surfaced. Remove the fat using a gravy separator, a basting tube, or a spoon. Wipe the braising pot dry.

Set the reserved garnish-cooking skillet over medium heat. Deglaze the pan by pouring in some of the defatted sauce and scraping up the caramelized juices. Add this deglazing liquid to the defatted sauce.

Return the sauce to the braising pot, passing it through a fine strainer, and bring to a simmer. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, knead together the butter and flour to a paste, called a *beurre manié*. Using a whisk, rapidly blend small amounts of the *beurre manié* into the simmering sauce until it is the consistency you like. You may not need all the *beurre manié*. Simmer the sauce for about 5 min. to cook off the raw flour taste.

Return the meat and garnishes to the pot with the sauce, and season with salt and pepper. Shake the pan back and forth on medium low to blend the elements. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook for 15 to 20 min., leaving the lid askew so steam can evaporate (trapping the steam would dilute the sauce). Correct the final seasoning with salt and pepper to taste, or, if you're serving wine, fine-tune the sauce as instructed in the wine sidebar below.

To serve the braise—Heat the oven to 275°F. Set the bread triangles on a baking sheet and top them with a cake rack to prevent buckling. Bake until dry, turning once, about 8 min.

As close as possible to serving time, heat the olive oil in a large frying pan until it starts shimmering. Fry the bread, a few pieces at a time, until golden, turning once. Drain on a thick layer of paper towels.

Transfer the finished braise (well reheated, if necessary) into a deep country dish or platter. Sprinkle with chopped parsley and arrange the croutons alternated with parsley leaves all around the dish.

Madeleine Kamman has taught culinary arts for the last 39 years and has written several cookbooks, including The New Making of a Cook (Morrow). ♦

wine choices



Choose a moderately priced Burgundy or a medium-bodied Côtes du Rhône

You'd assume that beef Bourguignon, which is as Bourguignon as it gets, would demand nothing but Burgundy wine in the pot. But prices for top-flight Burgundy are out of sight, and the delicate subtleties would get lost in cooking, anyway. "A good, younger Burgundy is an affordable alternative," says Madeleine Kamman. Try Louis Jadot Pinot Noir (about \$13) or Joseph Drouhin "La Forêt" Bourgogne (about \$12). For drinking, serve the same wine, or else a better one of the same grape type and origin, like a Pinot Noir from California, such as Landmark or Mondavi, both about \$35.

"Many other wines yield a good, strong sauce," says Madeleine. Try a robust Côtes du Rhône like Perrin Reserve (about \$10) or a lightly tannic wine from France's Languedoc-Roussillon, like Château La Rèze Minervois (about \$10) or Jaja de Jau red (about \$8). "Don't use cheap wine, for it delivers a thin sauce," she warns. Taste the wine critically first, she says, reminding us that though tannins make the mouth feel dry and puckery, a moderate amount gives body to a sauce. A wine destined for this dish is too tannic if you feel the tannins on the back of your tongue and also up front behind your front teeth.

To fine-tune the beef Bourguignon's sauce to pair with the wine you're serving, Madeleine advises tasting a small bit of meat coated with sauce and then immediately taking a sip of wine (never taste both together). If the wine tastes a bit sharp or acidic, gradually add salt to the stew until the wine feels more "round" on the palate. If the wine doesn't become more fruity and less assertive, stir a tiny bit of mashed anchovy into the stew until the wine acquires a roundness of flavor.

Amy Albert is an associate editor for Fine Cooking.



Janet Fletcher cranks up the heat for an Asian-inspired stir-fry.

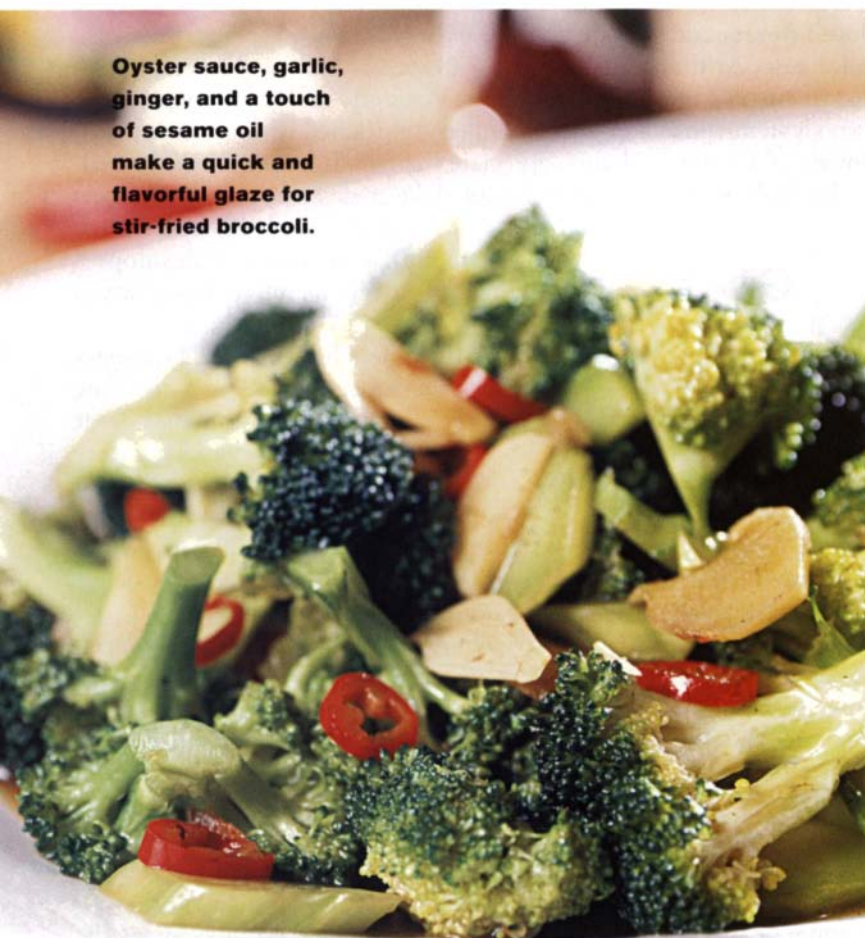
Broccoli

Boldly Seasoned

Cook versatile broccoli in stir-fries, pasta sauces, side dishes, and frittatas; just remember to season generously for the tastiest results

BY JANET FLETCHER

Oyster sauce, garlic, ginger, and a touch of sesame oil make a quick and flavorful glaze for stir-fried broccoli.



It may not be on everyone's list of the world's sexiest vegetables, but broccoli is a cook's dependable friend. It's always in the market, almost always in good condition, and it's reliably inexpensive. Given its popularity with shoppers today (even kids like eating "trees"), it's hard to believe that this vegetable was almost unknown outside the immigrant Italian community until the 1920s. But since broccoli has gained a reputation as a nutritional powerhouse (it's an excellent source of calcium, as well as antioxidant vitamins C and E and other cancer-fighting phytochemicals), it's now more popular than ever, and cooks have learned that broccoli is eminently adaptable in the kitchen. Although broccoli is a cool-weather crop in most home gardens, it's in good supply commercially year-round. At my house, however, it's more often on the table in cold months, when its sturdy character is most satisfying.

Broccoli can be simply boiled or steamed and dressed with extra-virgin olive oil and lemon. It can be stir-fried with Asian seasonings—beef with broccoli is a Chinese classic—or braised in a covered skillet with pancetta and rosemary. (Keep in mind that covering broccoli as it cooks will compromise its bright green color and bring out its stronger, cabbage-like flavors.) It can even be tossed with a little oil and coarse salt and roasted quickly in a hot oven.

In my kitchen, broccoli usually gets an aggressive treatment. I like it best with bold seasonings, such as anchovies, garlic (lots), pecorino cheese, spicy

Get the most from a head of broccoli



Don't throw broccoli stems away—just peel them with a paring knife to remove the tough skin.



Slice the pared stems into crunchy medallions. They're delicious raw, in salads, and in stir-fries.



Slice the florets through the stem. This creates more surface area so they cook more evenly when stir-fried.

sausage, olives, oyster sauce, and fish sauce. Sometimes I purée it with potatoes, chicken broth, and dill for soup; or with olive oil, pine nuts, basil, Parmesan, and a touch of cream for a pasta sauce. I might also chop it and cook it slowly in olive oil with garlic and anchovies to make a soft spread for bruschetta.

Look for compact, tightly closed florets and thin-skinned stems on the slender side. At the market, avoid broccoli that's dried or cracked on the cut end or that has obviously woody stems, and leave behind any yellowing specimens. If it passes the visual inspection, take a whiff—broccoli should smell fresh, not strong and cabbagey. At home, store it in a loose (unsealed) plastic bag in the refrigerator crisper. It will keep for a few days, but you should use it as quickly as possible, before the florets start to deteriorate.

I've never understood why people pay extra at the market to buy only the trimmed florets. To my taste, the stem is the best part. It's sweet and crunchy when raw—like a young radish—and pleasantly mild when cooked. The key is to pare the stems generously with a knife or a vegetable peeler to remove the tough outer layer. Sometimes I separate stems from florets, and then pare and slice the stems and have them as a nibble while I cook the florets.

Broccoli can be cooked slowly or quickly steamed. When I want to serve broccoli *al dente*, I prefer to steam it rather than boil it. It doesn't absorb as much water when it's steamed, and it's easier to get the timing right. But if I'm making a pasta sauce with broccoli and heating pasta water anyway, I boil

the broccoli and then use the water I cooked the broccoli in to cook the pasta. Either way, if you plan to cook the spears whole, slit the stems so they'll cook as quickly as the more delicate florets.

Some people believe that the worst crime you can commit against broccoli is overcooking it. They want their spears bright green and firm to the tooth. Although I enjoy broccoli that way—especially if it's dressed with a vinaigrette and some chopped egg or anchovy fillets, or drizzled with oyster sauce—I also appreciate the rich, developed taste of well-cooked broccoli. Like green beans that southerners

simmer for hours with ham or bacon, broccoli develops a deeper, fuller taste when braised at length.

What's hard to like is soggy broccoli. Boiling it too long or failing to drain and dry it properly will yield a watery vegetable with watered-down taste. If you're serving whole spears or whole florets, be sure

to drain them well and pat them dry before saucing. Those little florets just love to hold water.

To help build your broccoli repertoire, I've developed four recipes that demonstrate the vegetable's versatility. In one recipe, it adds backbone to a traditional frittata. In another, it makes a zesty pasta sauce with hot Italian sausage. I've also stir-fried it with oyster sauce and sesame oil to create a speedy side dish for a Chinese- or Thai-inspired dinner. And, finally, I've steamed it in the most basic manner and then dressed it with *bagna cauda* (pronounced BAHN-yah KOW-dah), a warm Italian anchovy and garlic sauce. I hope these ideas will inspire you to bring broccoli to your table more often.

Give broccoli a whiff—it should smell fresh, not strong and cabbagey.

Orecchiette with Broccoli & Italian Sausage

In southern Italy, this dish would likely be made with broccoli raab, but conventional broccoli is a fine alternative. I undercook the pasta slightly and then cook it together with the sauce for a couple of minutes to blend the flavors. The concave orecchiette cradle the bits of sausage and broccoli nicely. You can omit the red pepper flakes or decrease the amount if you like.
Serves six.

1¼ lb. broccoli
Coarse salt
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
½ lb. bulk hot Italian sausage, preferably with fennel seed
½ tsp. hot red pepper flakes
3 large cloves garlic, minced
1 lb. orecchiette pasta
½ cup freshly grated pecorino cheese

Separate the broccoli florets from the stems and then pare the stems with a knife. Leave the floret



A little pasta water is a useful addition to the sauce—it keeps things loose and creamy.

clusters whole unless they're especially large; if so, cut them in half.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the stems and cook for 3 or 4 min.; add the florets, and cook both for another 5 min. until both are just tender (test with a sharp paring knife). With tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the pieces to ice water as they're done. When cool, drain the broccoli well and chop it coarsely. Top up the pot with more hot water and return it to a boil.

Heat the olive oil in a 12-inch skillet over moderate heat. Add the sausage and cook, crumbling it with a wooden spoon, until it loses its pink color. Add the red pepper flakes and garlic and sauté briefly to release the garlic's fragrance. Add the broccoli and

season well with salt. Stir to coat the broccoli with the seasonings. Keep warm over low heat.

Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook it until it's just shy of *al dente* (1 to 2 min. less than the suggested cooking time). Reserve 1 cup of the cooking liquid by removing it with a ladle or a measuring cup. Drain the pasta and return it to the warm, empty pot. Add the contents of the skillet to the pasta and cook it over moderate heat, stirring constantly, until the pasta is *al dente*, adding as much of the reserved water as needed to keep the pasta moist. Remove from the heat, stir in ¼ cup of the cheese, and divide the pasta among six warm bowls. Top each portion with some of the remaining cheese.

Stir-Fried Broccoli with Oyster Sauce

Cut in small pieces, broccoli can be quickly stir-fried and glazed with oyster sauce and a hint of sesame oil. If possible, buy oyster sauce at a store where Asians shop. Lee Kum Kee oyster sauce has a richer, more appealing flavor than brands developed for the American supermarket. If you have fish sauce on hand, add a small splash to the sauce. Serve this dish as part of an Asian-influenced dinner with steamed rice to soak up the sauce. It also makes a delicious and simple vegetable main dish; add a few water chestnuts for crunch. *Serves three to four as a side dish.*

(Continued)



Broccoli chopped into small pieces is the perfect sauce ingredient for a pasta dish featuring small, curved shapes like orecchiette.

1 lb. broccoli
1 Tbs. canned low-salt chicken stock or water
½ tsp. cornstarch
2 Tbs. oyster sauce
1½ tsp. toasted sesame oil
2 Tbs. peanut or vegetable oil
4 cloves garlic, sliced
1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled, cut into quarter-size coins, and smashed with the side of a knife
1 fresh red chile, thinly sliced (optional)

Separate the broccoli florets from the stems. Pare the stems with a paring knife or vegetable peeler and cut them into ¼-inch slices on the diagonal. Separate the floret clusters into smaller florets (1 inch wide) and halve them lengthwise if large. The pieces need to be small to cook quickly, but not so small that they risk getting overcooked.

In a small bowl, stir together the stock and cornstarch until the cornstarch dissolves. Add the oyster sauce and toasted sesame oil and stir to blend.

Heat a large wok (or high-sided skillet) over high heat. When hot, add the peanut oil and swirl to coat. When the oil is hot, add the garlic, ginger, and chile (if using) and stir-fry for 15 seconds to release the garlic's fragrance. Be careful not to let the garlic burn. Add the broccoli stems and florets and stir-fry until crisp-tender, about 3 min., adding water, 1 to 2 Tbs. at a time, if needed. Add the oyster sauce mixture and

stir-fry for about 30 seconds to allow the cornstarch to thicken the sauce lightly. Immediately transfer to a warm platter and serve.

Broccoli with Bagna Cauda

Slow cooking is the secret to success with *bagna cauda*, the warm anchovy and garlic dip that is a specialty of Italy's Piedmont region. There, diners dunk vegetables in a communal pot of *bagna cauda* ("hot bath"). Here, I've used the pungent mixture as a sauce for steamed broccoli. You may need a flame tamer to keep the *bagna cauda* from burning. For this dish, it's crucial that you choose your anchovies carefully. I like the meaty, oil-packed Agostino Recca anchovies from Sicily; they come in a glass jar (or salt-packed in large tins: these you must fillet and rinse). *Serves four.*

1 Tbs. butter
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
6 large cloves garlic, minced to a paste
3 anchovy fillets, minced to a paste
1¼ to 1½ lb. broccoli

To make the *bagna cauda*—In a small, heavy saucepan, heat the butter and 1 Tbs. of the olive oil over low heat until the butter melts. Add the garlic and cook 10 min., stirring occasionally; don't let the garlic brown. Add the remaining oil and the anchovies and

Broccoli cousins are multiplying

Broccoli fans are finding a lot to like at produce markets these days. In addition to conventional broccoli, many stores now carry several broccoli relatives and look-alikes. Keep an eye out for **broccoflower**, a cross between cauliflower and broccoli that looks like a green cauliflower and tastes more of cauliflower than broccoli.

You might also see **purple broccoli** or **purple-sprouting broccoli**, which produces lots of tender side shoots but resembles conventional broccoli in taste. **Chinese broccoli (*gai lan*)**, is a particularly flavorful, leafy variety with thick stems. The new thin-stemmed **broccolini** is a cross between conventional and Chinese

broccoli with a flavor reminiscent of both. Broccolini is sometimes marketed as **aspiration**, but it isn't related to asparagus.

The pleasantly bitter **broccoli raab** (also called **broccoli rabe** or **rapini**) is related to turnips, not to broccoli, but it has a broccoli-like appearance and taste. Paradoxically, the thinnest stems tend to be the toughest. If the stems feel wiry or stringy, I remove them; if they're thicker than a pencil but tender, I slit them to help them cook more quickly.

Don't hesitate to try some of these more unusual vegetables in the recipes that follow, although you may need to adjust cooking times.



Broccoflower



Purple broccoli



Chinese broccoli (*gai lan*)



Broccolini



Broccoli raab

stir to dissolve the anchovies. Cook, stirring occasionally, over lowest heat for 30 min., using a flame tamer if necessary to keep the garlic and anchovies from burning. The mixture should barely simmer.

While the *bagna cauda* cooks, trim the broccoli spears, leaving 2 inches of stem attached to the florets. Pare the stems with a vegetable peeler or a paring knife and then halve or quarter the spears lengthwise, depending on thickness.

Steam the broccoli over boiling water in a covered saucepan until crisp-tender, about 5 min. Transfer to a clean dishtowel and pat dry and then arrange the spears on a platter or individual serving dishes. Spoon the *bagna cauda* over the spears.

Broccoli & Herb Frittata

I often have a frittata for lunch, with some sliced tomatoes or a green salad. It also makes a nice hors d'oeuvre if served in thin wedges. Be sure to cook the broccoli until completely tender. Substitute fresh mint or dill for the basil, if you like. *Serves four.*

1 lb. broccoli

Coarse salt

5 large eggs, beaten with a fork to blend

½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

2 Tbs. chopped fresh basil

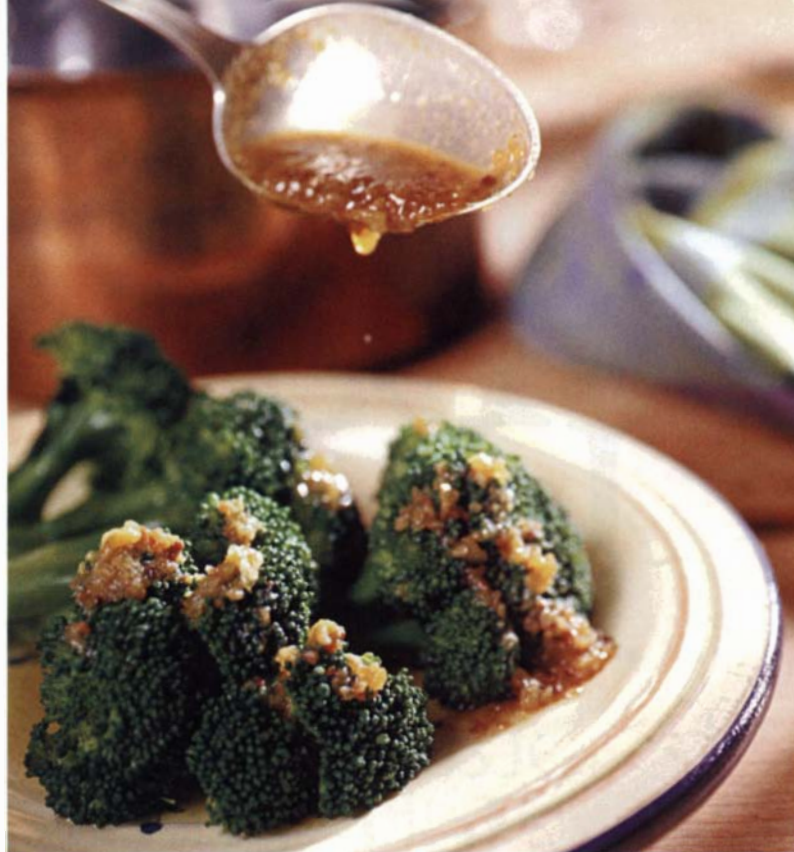
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

1 Tbs. unsalted butter

1 Tbs. olive oil

Separate the broccoli florets from the stems and then pare the stems with a knife. Leave the floret clusters whole unless they're especially large; if so, cut them in half.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the stems and cook 4 min.; add the florets and cook both for another 6 min. (Alternatively, put them all in at the same time and remove the florets first). With a sharp paring knife, check to see if the broccoli is tender all the way through. With tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the pieces to ice water as they're done. When cool, drain the broccoli well and chop it finely.



Steamed broccoli meets its savory match in *bagna cauda*, a slow-cooked garlic and anchovy sauce.

Heat the broiler and position a rack 8 inches from the element. In a large bowl, combine the eggs, broccoli, cheese, basil, 1 tsp. salt, and the pepper.

Heat the butter and oil in an ovenproof 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. When the butter and oil are hot, add the egg mixture, spreading it evenly. Turn the heat to very low and cook until the mixture is mostly set, 15 to 18 min. The surface will still be undercooked, but the edges will be firm and visibly lighter in color. Move the skillet to the oven and broil until the frittata feels just firm throughout, about 5 min.

Set a cutting board or a large platter over the skillet and invert both. Let the frittata cool to room temperature before cutting into wedges to serve.

Janet Fletcher is the author of Fresh from the Farmers' Market (Chronicle). ♦



Be sure your skillet is hot and the butter and oil are sizzling before adding the frittata ingredients.



Frittata flip.

Cover the skillet with a cutting board and invert both. Let the frittata cool for a few minutes before cutting it into wedges.

Subtle Bay Leaf Stands on Its Own

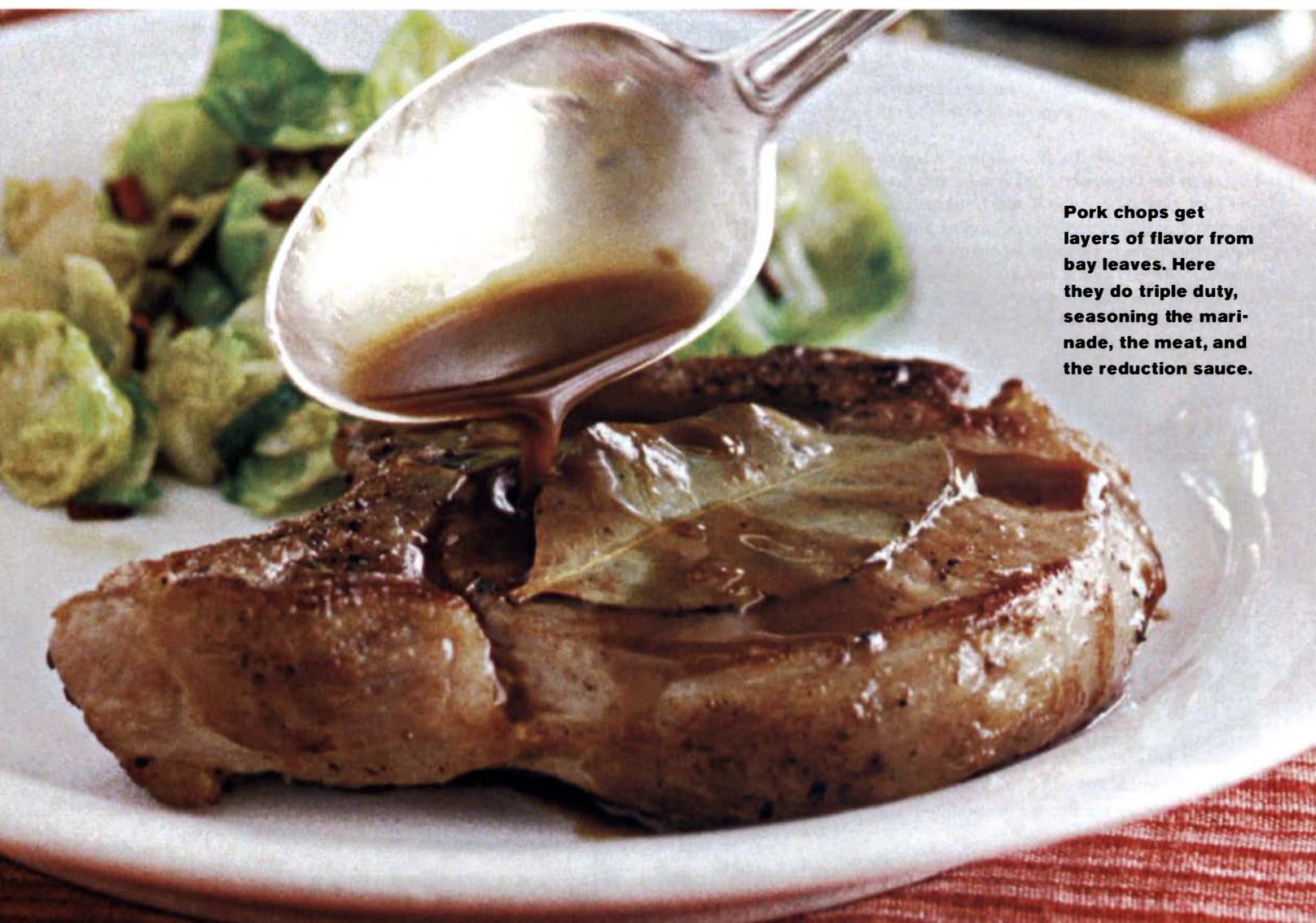
For an herb that's probably used more often than any other, the bay leaf is the least understood. We add it to soups and stews as regularly as we add milk to coffee, and then we discard it before anyone can find out it's there. And so it eludes us. Bay leaves are included in so many recipes without notice or purpose, I've sometimes wondered why we bother.

But bay leaf does have a beauty of its own. The depth of its bouquet, which is both flowery and spicy, lends itself to use in savory and sweet dishes: seared pork chops, marinated goat cheese, risotto, pilafs, roasts, and even rice pudding.

Fresh bay is more potent than dried

You'll run across two main varieties of bay leaves. From California come thin, two- to three-inch-long

Photos except where noted: Amy Albert



Pork chops get layers of flavor from bay leaves. Here they do triple duty, seasoning the marinade, the meat, and the reduction sauce.



Briefly warming bay leaves in olive oil flavors the oil to use as a marinade.



Flavors mingle deliciously in a jar filled with goat cheese, the flavored olive oil, olives, peppercorns, and fresh thyme.



Marinated goat cheese is a delectable topping for mixed greens. Use the marinating oil for a vinaigrette.

pointed leaves that smell minty. There's also a shorter, fatter variety called "Turkish" or "imported," with a more grassy perfume. The differences between the varieties are clear, especially when it comes to fresh. California bay is much more potent. Turkish is subtle and pleasant, but it's much better fresh. You may find a preference for one or the other once you cook with them. The California bay leaf comes from a different family than the Turkish, and it does have one potential quirk: when used in excess, it can cause headaches due to a compound it contains.

Fresh bay leaves are bright green and waxy, and they bend and twist without tearing. Look for them in specialty stores, from mail-order sources (see p. 76), and in ethnic markets where the turnover is quick and the leaves usually come straight from the source. The perfume of fresh bay is much stronger than dried so, unlike other herbs, use a smaller amount of fresh than you would dried. I've found that fresh bay has a livelier flavor, but in

Bay leaf can be more than a supporting player; here it stars—infusing marinades, chops, and even dessert

BY AMANDA HESSER

broths, it doesn't matter as much because the moist heat effectively drains the flavor out of either. If you're using dried bay in a marinade, add an extra leaf. If you have your own tree or are given a branch of fresh bay, put it in a glass of water and keep it on the kitchen counter, where it will stay fresh for about ten days.

Dried bay leaves should be free of blem-

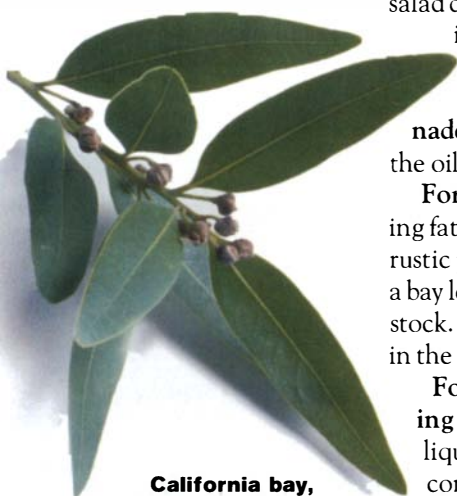
ishes, cracks, and tears. To bring out the most flavor, I like to soak them in warm water for 15 minutes or so, especially for cold preparations like marinades, but there's no need to pound or crush bay before adding it to a dish. Well sealed, bay will last about two years before losing its perfume.

As the main seasoning, bay leaf holds its own Bay succeeds wonderfully when used as the main seasoning—in all kinds of preparations.

For vinaigrettes, make your standard recipe, add a bay leaf, and let it sit for about a day. For a creamy



Turkish or Mediterranean bay is prized for its deep, subtle flavor.



California bay, whether fresh or dried, is more potent than Turkish.

salad dressing, scald the cream with a bay leaf and let it sit for five to ten minutes. Whisk the cooled cream into a lemon or red-wine vinaigrette.

For meat, vegetable, and cheese marinades, tuck in a few bay leaves before pouring on the oil and the rest of the ingredients.

For braises and sautés, add bay leaf to the cooking fat as it heats, just as you would garlic. For great rustic potatoes, make several slits in a potato, insert a bay leaf in the center slit, and braise the potatoes in stock. The bay leaf flavors the potato while curling in the heat of the oven.

For a bouquet garni for soups, stews, or poaching liquids, use one bay leaf for every quart of liquid, and make a sachet of bay, thyme, peppercorns, and garlic cloves or leek greens.

For pilafs, beans, and kasha, add a bay leaf along with the cooking liquid.

For roasts, line the roasting pan with a bed of bay leaves. For roast chicken, stuff some bay leaves into the cavity.

For grilling, lay a few bay leaves on top of and underneath whatever you're cook-

ing for a subtle hint of flavor. Or, thread bay leaves on skewers, interposing them with seafood, vegetables, and meats.

For baking bread, line the proofing bowl and the baking stone with a few bay leaves, using one or two on top of the loaf for decoration. The leaves gently infuse the crust and they bake to a dark gun-metal gray.

Bay rounds out sweet flavors in desserts

The more unexpected use of bay is in desserts, where its background perfume rounds out sweet flavors.

◆ For chocolate ganache, let a leaf infuse in the cream before mixing it with the dark chocolate. The bay adds depth, and it's a nice way to enrich the dessert without being too off-the-wall.

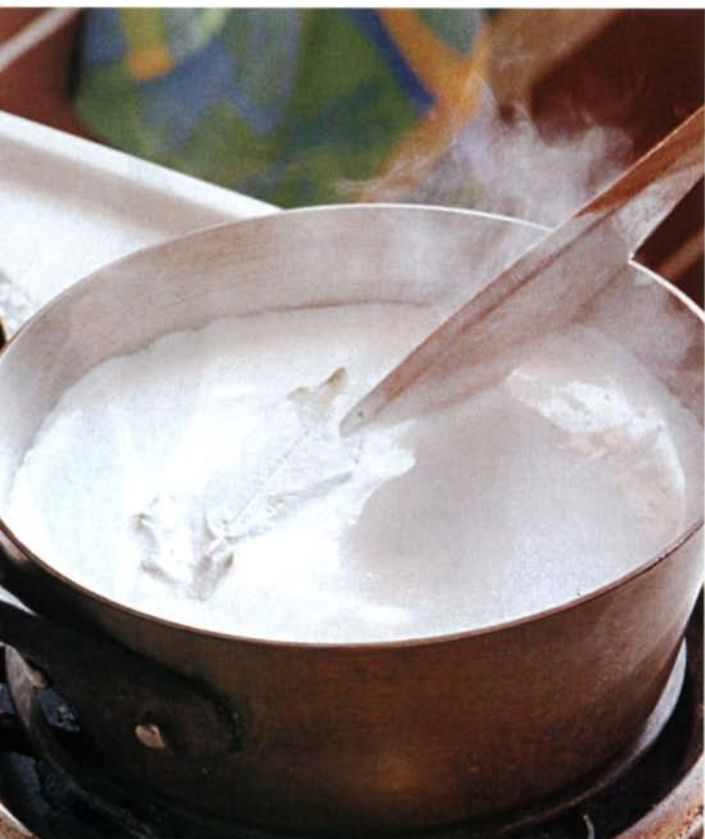
◆ Make a bay leaf sorbet or granita by infusing the sugar syrup with a few leaves.

◆ Flavor fruit poaching syrups with a bay leaf.

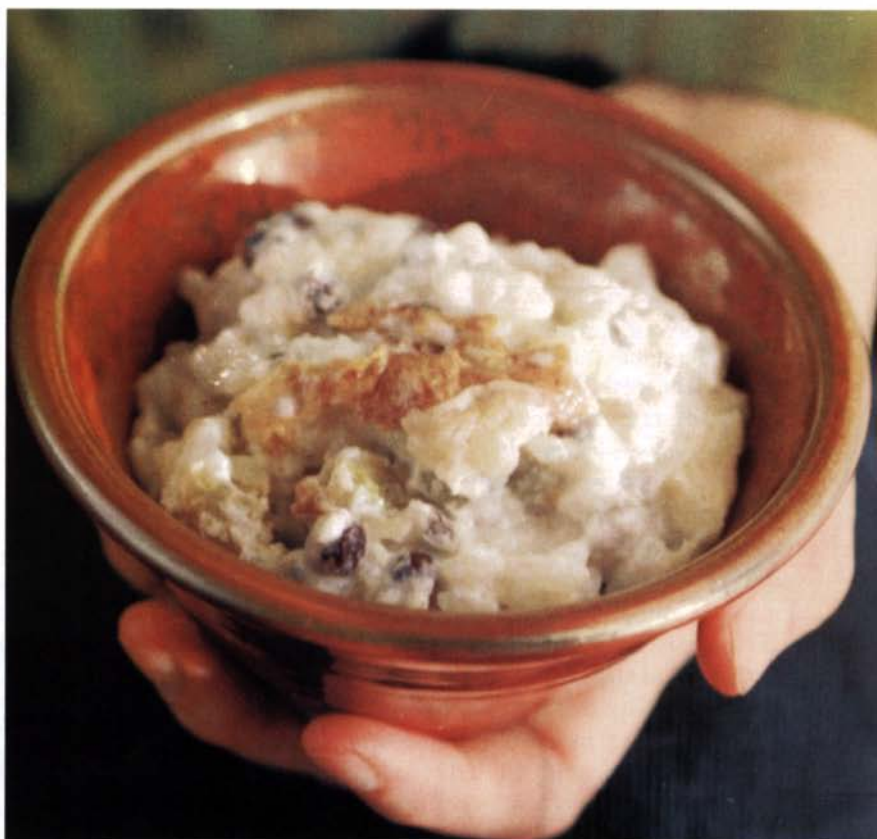
◆ For pastry creams, custards, or puddings, scald the milk or cream with a bay leaf.

◆ For dusting cakes with confectioners' sugar, use bay leaves as a stencil.

You can't always
tell that bay is there,
but you'd miss it
if it weren't.



Infusing bay leaves in cream gives a nutty-sweet flavor...



...and the bay-infused cream adds a touch of mystery to that classic comfort food, rice pudding.

Goat Cheese & Olives Marinated in Olive Oil with Bay Leaf & Peppercorns

Pull the jar out of the refrigerator about half an hour before serving. Vary the recipe by using *ricotta salata* cut into 1-inch cubes and lemon zest in place of the orange. *Serves four.*

3 fresh or dried bay leaves
1 tsp. white peppercorns, lightly crushed
1 tsp. black peppercorns, lightly crushed
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil; more as needed
2 logs goat cheese (4 oz. each), cut into ½-inch rounds with a warm, sharp knife
12 to 16 good-quality green olives in brine (such as Sicilian), drained
Peeled zest of ½ orange
2 sprigs fresh thyme

In a small pan, combine the bay leaves, peppercorns, and olive oil and set over medium heat just until you begin to smell the bay, about 3 min. Be careful that the leaves don't burn. Remove from the heat and let cool completely. Meanwhile, sterilize a 16-oz. glass jar with boiling water and dry it completely. Pour a little of the oil into the jar to cover the bottom and then add the goat cheese rounds and olives, spooning in the orange peel, thyme, bay leaves, and peppercorns to mingle around them. Pour in the rest of the olive oil, adding more straight from the bottle if needed to cover. Seal the jar and let marinate in the refrigerator for up to two weeks, checking every few days to make sure the cheese doesn't fall apart. If it starts to disintegrate, use it right away. Don't eat the bay leaves.

Rice Pudding with Bay Leaves

This pudding will have a firmer texture if you let it sit for a day before serving. *Serves four to six.*

⅓ cup arborio rice
3½ cups milk
1 fresh bay leaf or 2 dried
Pinch salt
⅓ cup sugar
1 vanilla bean, split, seeds scraped (or 1 tsp. vanilla extract)
½ cup heavy cream
¼ cup golden raisins
¼ cup currants

Heat the oven to 350°F and butter a shallow 1 ½-qt. baking dish. In a medium saucepan, combine the rice, milk, bay leaf, salt, and sugar. Bring the milk almost to a boil and then reduce the heat and cook at a vigorous simmer, stirring from time to time, until the rice begins to soften but isn't completely tender to the tooth, 10 to 12 min. Discard the bay leaf. Combine the vanilla seeds and pod and the cream in a small pan. Scald the cream; set aside to cool. (If you're using vanilla extract, add it now.) Discard the vanilla bean pod. Add the cream, raisins, and currants to the rice and pour the mixture into the baking dish. Bake uncovered until a golden skin forms on the top, 20 to 25 min. The pudding will be a little soupy the first day and will thicken and improve by the second and third days.

Pork Chops Marinated with Bay Leaves & Lemon

This recipe incorporates bay in layers of flavor. The bay leaves contribute first to the pork marinade, are then incorporated in the cooking, and finally flavor the reduction sauce (if you use dried leaves). Be sure to start marinating the chops the morning of the day you want to serve this dish. *Serves four.*

Peeled zest of 1 lemon
4 pork loin chops, about ¾ inch thick
4 Tbs. olive oil
4 fresh bay leaves or 5 dried bay leaves
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock

In a shallow dish, combine the lemon peel, pork chops, 3 Tbs. of the olive oil, and 4 of the bay leaves. (If you're using dried leaves, reserve the fifth for the sauce). Rub the chops in the marinade to coat and put 1 bay leaf under each chop. Cover with plastic wrap and let marinate in the refrigerator 8 to 16 hours, turning the chops two or three times.

Heat the oven to 375°F. Season the pork chops on both sides with salt and pepper, reserving the strips of lemon peel, setting a bay leaf on top of each chop. In a large oven-proof sauté pan, heat the butter and remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil over medium-high heat. When the butter is foaming, add the pork chops (bay leaf side down) and sauté to a deep ochre brown, 5 to 7 min. Turn them as they color, and brown the other side, 5 min. more. Transfer the pan to the oven and bake for 5 to 7 min. To check if the chops are cooked, make a small incision in the center of one of the chops to peek at the meat—it should be light pink, not gray, when done. Transfer the chops to a serving plate and pour off the fat in the pan, taking care to keep the juices in. Over medium-high heat, add the stock, half of the reserved lemon peel, and, if you're using dried bay leaves, the remaining bay leaf. Boil, scraping up any browned bits from the pan with a wooden spoon. Reduce to about ⅓ cup. Remove from the heat and taste; the sauce should be full-flavored. Strain into a small serving bowl. Pour any accumulated juices from the chops into the sauce and stir to incorporate. Spoon the sauce over the pork and serve, passing the remaining sauce separately. Don't eat the bay leaves.



"Rather than removing bay leaves from a dish, I like to leave them in," says Amanda Hesser.

Amanda Hesser is the author of The Cook & The Gardener: A Year of Recipes & Writings from the French Countryside (Norton). ♦



Pasta bakes fast in a wide, shallow dish. Skip the deep lasagne pan; choose a gratin instead.



Erica De Mane offers her version of classic baked ziti, made with sausage and seasoned with fresh—not dried—herbs.

A Fresh Take on Baked Pasta

Create a lighter, more boldly flavored dish with vibrant ingredients and a very hot oven

BY ERICA DE MANE

I've eaten many baked pasta dishes over the years, mostly at Italian-American homes and restaurants. Occasionally they've been exquisite, but more often than not I've been served something heavy, dense, and welded together with gluey mozzarella and tomato paste. Even in southern Italy, where most of these dishes have their origins, the baked pastas I've sampled in rural trattorias haven't been much different (so you can't blame Americans for this one).

A major problem is that long, low-heat cooking, the way most of these dishes are traditionally prepared, allows the pasta to soak up too much moisture from the sauce, resulting in waterlogged, mushy pasta.

I've been experimenting with the baked pasta concept, and I've come up with a few easy ways to make these potentially wonderful dishes lighter and fresher yet still wholly satisfying. The result you're after is a dish that has a creamy, moist interior and a firm, crisp crust. The best way to achieve this is by baking the pasta in a hot oven (at least 425°F) for no longer than 20 minutes, just until the top—often helped along with a sprinkling of breadcrumbs—is browned and the dish is bubbling hot.

Think of it as a pasta gratin

I like to bake the pasta in a wide, shallow baking dish—a gratin dish, really. This provides more sur-



This spoonful says it all. Melted cheese, a brightly flavored sauce, and a crisp top mean a perfect baked ziti.

face area for a crispy crust and allows the interior to heat through quicker, keeping the pasta firm and the sauce moist. I use a 13-inch-long oval dish that's 2 inches deep. Square or round dishes of equivalent size will work, too.

Choose imported pasta and cook it *al dente*. Generally, dried durum wheat pasta in sturdy shapes like rigatoni and penne hold up best in baked dishes. I prefer Italian brands, which cook up firm and have a good nutty taste. I've also had luck using fresh egg pasta, such as fettuccine, as long as I undercook it slightly.

Because you don't want the pasta in your finished dish to be mushy, drain the pasta while it's still quite firm to the bite. The starch from the pasta itself will also give your dish some firmness as it bakes, so don't rinse the pasta after boiling (not that you would even think of such a thing, would you?).

Focused, boldly flavored ingredients stand up to baking. The time-honored tomato-mozzarella-

and ricotta baked pasta can be wonderful when not baked to death (I've included my version here), but I also like to explore less common flavoring options, such as the orange zest paired with roasted peppers in the baked cavatappi recipe. Instead of using a dried herb, I add an abundant amount of its fresh counterpart, which keeps the filling's flavor bright, and in the case of the baked ziti, deliciously unexpected. I also like to use all different kinds of cheeses: fresh goat cheese, Gruyère, Taleggio, mascarpone, and fontina all melt beautifully and will pull you out of the mozzarella rut, while pecorino and *grana padano* are delicious—and less expensive—replacements for *parmigiano reggiano*.

Season each element of the dish. A baked dish is difficult to properly season once it's assembled; you can only really get at the top. That's why you need to add salt and pepper as you go, seasoning the vegetables you're sautéing as well as the béchamel you're whisking. Remember to salt the

pasta water generously, and add a pinch of salt and pepper to the breadcrumb topping. Each component of your baked pasta should taste wonderful on its own. If it does, you won't wind up with a flat-tasting finished dish.

Be generous with the sauce, but go easy on the cheese. Baked pasta needs a bit more sauce than unbaked pasta, because some gets soaked up when you bake the pasta and some just evaporates with the oven heat. The pasta should be well coated and even a bit loosely sauced before baking. A hard grating cheese, like *parmigiano reggiano* or an aged pecorino, adds body to the dish, but a little goes a long way. Too much will make your pasta stiff.

Add crunch by sprinkling with breadcrumbs and cooking uncovered. For the best flavor and texture, make your own breadcrumbs; it takes no time at all, and the difference is huge. Commercially packaged breadcrumbs always taste like chemicals to me and are too finely ground, which can sometimes result in a mushy topping. Simply break good quality, day-old Italian or French bread into small pieces and then pulse the pieces in the food processor until you have a slightly rough crumb. There's no need to toast breadcrumbs for a baked pasta; the oven will do that.

To prevent the pasta from steaming (which will make it soggy) and to assure a browned top, bake the pasta uncovered. It's in the oven for such a short period that there's little risk of overcooking the top.

Traditionally you let a baked pasta rest a few minutes after removing it from the oven to firm it up. This is a good idea with lasagne, where you want to cut neat, square servings, but with less constructed baked dishes made with dried pasta such as ziti, or even with fresh fettuccine, the looseness is part of the charm. I take those dishes from the oven and serve them right away (they tend to get gummy when reheated), making sure everyone gets an ample amount of the crisp top.

You can make these ahead

One of the things I like about these pastas is that during the 20 minutes they're baking, you have enough time to clean the dishes and dress your salad. But I know that part of the charm of a baked pasta dish is its make-ahead-ness. Yes, you can assemble these completely ahead, keep them refrigerated for a day, and then bake them. But your results will be good—not great. The way to get ahead of the game with these recipes, and keep their distinctly fresh feel, is to make the components ahead of time—sauté the vegetables, cook the sauce, combine the cheeses, boil the pasta—and then combine everything just before baking. Just keep in mind that if you start with cold ingredients, you may need to bake the dish an extra five minutes or so.



To make a béchamel, stir milk into a butter and flour roux.

RECIPES

Fresh Fettuccine with Asparagus, Lemon, Pine Nuts & Mascarpone

Mascarpone cheese is a rich Italian cream cheese. It usually comes in a plastic tub and is available at most supermarkets. *Grana padano* is a hard Italian grating cheese similar to Parmesan but with a less bold flavor and a lower price. *Serves four.*

2 Tbs. olive oil; more for the pan
2 lb. medium-thick asparagus, ends trimmed, cut in 1-inch pieces on an angle
8 scallions (whites and tender greens), cut in thin rounds
Finely grated zest from 2 lemons
Juice from 1 lemon (about 4 Tbs.)
A few sprigs fresh thyme or savory, leaves chopped
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 Tbs. all-purpose flour
1 cup whole milk
1 cup mascarpone
1 cup grated *grana padano* cheese
Small pinch cayenne
Generous pinch ground allspice
¾ cup homemade breadcrumbs
1 lb. fresh fettuccine
½ cup pine nuts, lightly toasted

Heat the oven to 450°F. (Note the slightly higher oven temperature I use when baking fresh egg pasta.) Lightly coat a large, shallow baking dish with olive oil. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the asparagus and blanch until tender but with a slight bite left to it, about 2 min. Scoop it from the water with a large slotted spoon, set it in a colander, and run it under cold water to preserve its green color. Drain well. Keep the water boiling for the pasta.

In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the scallions; sauté 1 min. to soften. Add the asparagus and sauté briefly, about 1 min. Take the skillet off the heat and add half the zest, the lemon juice, thyme, salt, and pepper; mix well and reserve.

In a medium saucepan, heat the butter and flour over medium heat, whisking until smooth. Cook for



A thin sauce is what you're after. Cook it until it has the consistency of heavy cream.

1 min., whisking constantly, to cook away the raw taste of the flour. Add the milk and cook, whisking all the while, until it comes to a boil. Lower the heat a bit and cook until smooth and lightly thickened (about the consistency of heavy cream), 3 or 4 min.

Turn off the heat and add the mascarpone, the remaining lemon zest, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the *grana padano*, whisking until the mixture is fairly smooth (there will be a slight grainy texture from the cheese). Season with the cayenne, allspice, and more salt and pepper.

In a small bowl, combine the breadcrumbs and the remaining *grana padano*. Season with salt and pepper and add a drizzle of olive oil. Mix well.

Return the cooking water to a full boil and cook the fettuccine, leaving it slightly underdone. Drain well. Return the fettuccine to the cooking pot. Add the mascarpone sauce, the pine nuts, and the asparagus with all its juices. Toss and taste for seasoning. Pour into the baking dish and sprinkle the breadcrumb mixture evenly over the top. Bake uncovered until bubbling and golden, 15 to 20 min. Serve right away.

Cavatappi with Roasted Peppers, Capocollo & Ricotta

Here the strong flavors of southern Italy are blended together to form a surprisingly mellow dish. In keeping with southern style, I like using meat sparingly—more as an accent flavor than a main ingredient. Capocollo



Breadcrumbs add a toasty crunch to creamy baked asparagus and fettuccine.



Cavatappi and roasted red peppers cling but don't clump. The best baked pasta dishes are only lightly bound.

is a lightly aged cured pork usually flavored with white wine and nutmeg. It's available at Italian markets, specialty food stores, and some supermarkets. If you can't find it, an excellent substitute is prosciutto di Parma, which will lend an even gentler taste to your finished dish. *Serves four.*

Olive oil
5 medium red bell peppers
1 large onion, thinly sliced
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
5 plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped
 (or one 14½-oz. can diced tomatoes, drained)
A few large sprigs of thyme, leaves chopped
⅓ lb. very thinly sliced capocollo, chopped
1½ cups fresh ricotta cheese
1½ cups heavy cream, preferably not ultrapasteurized
Pinch nutmeg, preferably freshly grated
1 to 2 tsp. finely grated orange zest
1 lb. cavatappi (or fusilli or penne)
¼ cup grated pecorino cheese
⅓ cup homemade breadcrumbs

Heat the oven to 425°F. Lightly coat a large, shallow baking dish with olive oil. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.

Roast the peppers by turning them over the flame of a gas burner until the skins are charred or by putting them under a broiler, turning until all sides are well blistered. Peel off the skins, core and seed the peppers, and cut the flesh into thin strips.

In a large skillet, heat about 3 Tbs. olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until it begins to soften. Add the peppers, season with salt and pepper, and sauté until soft and fragrant, about 5 min. Add the tomatoes and cook another 5 min. Turn off the heat and add the thyme and capocollo. Mix and set aside.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the ricotta, cream, nutmeg, and orange zest. Season with salt

and pepper and whisk until smooth (you can do this in a food processor if you like).

Cook the cavatappi until *al dente*. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, toss the grated pecorino with the breadcrumbs. Season with salt and pepper and add a drizzle of olive oil. Mix well.

Drain the pasta well and return it to the pot. Add the pepper mixture and toss. Add the ricotta mixture and toss again, tasting for seasoning. Pour the pasta into the baking dish. Top with an even coating of the breadcrumb mixture and a drizzle of fresh olive oil. Bake uncovered until browned and bubbling, about 15 to 20 min. Serve right away.

Baked Ziti with Tomato, Mozzarella & Sausage

Try to find freshly made ricotta and mozzarella to see how good this rustic dish can be. *Serves four.*

Olive oil
1 large onion, cut in small dice
2 cloves garlic, minced
¾ lb. sweet Italian pork sausage, removed from its casing and crumbled
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
¼ cup dry red wine
35-oz. can whole plum tomatoes, chopped, with their juice
¼ cup chopped fresh marjoram or oregano (from about 6 large sprigs)
1 cup fresh ricotta cheese
1 cup freshly grated mild pecorino cheese
Pinch nutmeg, preferably freshly grated
⅓ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 lb. ziti
½ lb. mozzarella, preferably fresh, cut in small cubes

Heat the oven to 425°F. Lightly oil a large, shallow baking dish. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.

In a large skillet, heat about 2 Tbs. olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until soft, about 5 min. Add the garlic and crumbled sausage and sauté until the sausage starts to brown. Season with salt and pepper. If the sausage gives off a lot of fat, pour off most of it, but leave a little to add flavor to the sauce. Add the red wine and let it boil until it's almost gone. Add the tomatoes with all of their juices and cook, uncovered, at a lively simmer for about 10 min. The sauce will thicken slightly. Add the marjoram or oregano and taste for seasoning.

In a large mixing bowl, mix together the ricotta, about half of the grated pecorino, the nutmeg, and the parsley. Season with salt and pepper.

Meanwhile, cook the ziti until *al dente*. Drain well and toss it with the ricotta mixture until well coated. Add the sausage and sauce and mix again. Add the mozzarella and toss gently. Pour everything into the baking dish and sprinkle the remaining pecorino on top. Bake uncovered until lightly browned and bubbling, about 20 min. Serve right away.

*Erica De Mane is a chef, writer, and teacher who specializes in southern Italian cooking. She recently wrote *Pasta Improvisata: How to Improvise in Classic Italian Style* (Scribner). ♦*



Choose colorful, crisp garnishes. Sliced snow peas or scallions, chopped peanuts or almonds, shredded daikon or carrots, all contrast with the noodles.

Tender, Nutty **Sesame** **Noodles** *at Their Best*

BY PATRICIA YEO

Forget gloppy—these are light, bouncy, and glistening with a fresh toasted sesame dressing

Ironically, I didn't grow up eating sesame noodles, even though I grew up in a Chinese-American household. In fact, I remember tasting this quintessential Chinese noodle dish for the first time when I was in college. It sounded so wonderful—cool noodles with a spicy sesame dressing. Unfortunately, those noodles were less than wonderful. The dish I tasted was a mass of gooey pasta heavily dressed with a bland sauce of peanuts and nary a hint of sesame. This early disappointment may account for my fanatic search for the perfect way to make sesame noodles. It



Toast sesame seeds until golden brown—about 15 minutes at 350°F. Watch that they don't burn.

Blend the sauce ingredients on high just until a thick, wet paste forms and the sesame seeds have broken up.



took many years of tasting different versions of sesame noodles (some much better than others) and testing at my own stove before I came up with a recipe I love.

These noodles glisten with a toasty sesame dressing that coats each noodle but doesn't drown it. Made from freshly toasted and ground sesame seeds, the tangy, sweet, and spicy flavors in the sauce marry with the noodles. A garnish of red pepper, snow peas, scallions, and daikon makes a cool, crunchy contrast.

Chinese egg noodles are my choice

Since the noodles are such a big part of this dish, it's worth the little extra effort to find the ones that work best. I prefer fresh Chinese egg noodles (also called wonton noodles), which are bouncy, light, and silken in texture when cooked. Most Asian groceries, and some supermarkets, carry them in the cooler in the produce section. My next favorite choice is an Italian



After the purée sits, drain off any excess oil and begin whisking in water to make a smooth sauce.

Choose fresh, high-quality ingredients.

Asian groceries sell fresh Chinese egg noodles and Japanese toasted sesame oil (Kyoto is my favorite). Be sure to buy fresh sesame seeds and good-quality peanut oil; both will taste off if they're old.



variety of thin dried egg noodles called fidellini. Or you could use capellini.

Fresh Chinese noodles take seconds to cook. The compacted noodles should be fluffed, but try not to tear them—in Chinese culture, long noodles are a metaphor for long life. Besides, it's easier and more fun to eat them this way. After cooking and draining the noodles, toss them in a little oil.

Toast and grind your own sesame seeds

The spicy sesame sauce is equally as important as the noodles. I make a velvety, rich blend of toasted, ground sesame seeds, peanut oil, soy sauce, rice vinegar, sugar, chile paste, garlic, and shallots that's much less sticky than recipes that call for peanut butter. I like toasting and grinding my own sesame seeds because I often find that store-bought tahini (sesame paste) can have a slightly off, almost rancid flavor.

Once you've toasted the sesame seeds and softened a little garlic and shallots on the stove, all the sauce ingredients (except the water) go into the blender at one time. The sesame seeds grind up as you blend the sauce ingredients together. The only tricky part is that you want to fully purée the ingredients, but if you mix them too much, the sesame seeds will give off too much oil. Don't worry, though; you can always pour any excess oil off the top of the purée after it sits. After making the purée, I like to leave time for the flavors to mingle, so I often make the purée the day before I'm going to use it and then whisk in the water just before dressing the noodles. The water emulsifies with the fats in the purée and creates a smooth, creamy sauce that coats more easily and feels nicer in your mouth.

By varying garnishes, sesame noodles can be a side dish or a meal-in-one. These noodles are so good that you can eat them as is, but you can also change the garnishes to suit your needs. I may add julienned carrots and sugar snap peas, or julienned mango, apples, and Asian pears for extra spark and crunch. If I don't have peanuts, I use almonds or pine nuts. To make it a main dish, I add grilled shrimp or scallops, or even thinly sliced beef or chicken.

RECIPE

Cold Sesame Noodles

Make the sesame purée several hours or a day ahead to let the flavors marry, but whisk in the water just before serving for a smooth, creamy consistency. The noodles can rest, cooked and tossed in oil, for half an hour, but don't dress them until ready to serve.

Serves six as a main dish; eight to ten as a side dish.



Water is key to a creamy sauce. Use the sauce right away; if it has to wait, whisk in a bit more water before using.

FOR THE SESAME DRESSING:

- ¾ cup plus 1 Tbs. (4 oz.) sesame seeds**
- 7 Tbs. peanut oil**
- 3 medium or 2 large shallots (about 2 oz. total), sliced**
- 1 large clove garlic, finely chopped**
- 1 Tbs. toasted sesame oil**
- 2 Tbs. soy sauce**
- ¼ cup rice vinegar**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- 1 tsp. hot chile paste**
- ¾ to 1 cup water (or less)**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro leaves**

FOR THE NOODLES:

- 12 oz. fresh Chinese egg noodles (sometimes called wonton noodles)**
- 3 Tbs. peanut oil**
- 1 cup blanched snow peas, thinly sliced**
- 1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced**
- 1 cup thinly sliced daikon radish**
- 1 cup fresh cilantro leaves**
- ½ cup chopped peanuts**
- 1 cup thinly sliced scallions (cut on the bias on a sharp angle)**

To make the dressing—Heat the oven to 350°F. Put the sesame seeds on a baking sheet and toast them in the oven until golden brown and fragrant, 15 to 20 min. Be careful not to overcook them. Put the toasted seeds in a blender.

In a skillet, heat 1 Tbs. of the peanut oil over medium-low heat. Sauté the shallots and garlic until softened, 3 to 5 min. Set aside to cool. Add the shallots, garlic, remaining 6 Tbs. peanut oil, sesame oil, soy sauce, rice vinegar, sugar, and chile paste to the sesame seeds in the blender. Blend on high speed just until a thick, rough paste forms, 2 to 3 min. Stop blending when most of the seeds have broken up and been puréed. After the paste forms, it will begin to get oily if you continue to purée it, as the seeds begin to give off their oil. Refrigerate the purée (for up to a day).

To cook and dress the noodles—Bring a large pot of unsalted water to a rolling boil. Gently fluff the noodles and add them to the water, stirring. Return the water to a boil and cook the noodles for just 10 to 30 seconds. (These tiny fresh noodles don't need much cooking. If it takes a minute or more for the water to come back to a boil, the noodles will already be done.) Drain the noodles immediately and cool them under cold running water. Drain well. Put the cold noodles in a bowl and toss with the peanut oil.

To assemble—When ready to dress the noodles, remove the purée from the refrigerator. Drain off any oil that has gathered on the top. Whisk about ¾ cup water into the purée to thin it and to reach a creamy consistency; the sauce will lighten in color and become emulsified; add more water as needed. Add the chopped cilantro to the sauce.

In a large bowl, toss the noodles with about half the dressing. Add the snow peas, red pepper, and daikon, and toss to combine (using your hands is easiest). Add more dressing if you like. Put the noodles in a large serving bowl or on individual plates. Garnish with the cilantro leaves, chopped peanuts, and sliced scallions, or pass little bowls of the garnishes at the table.



Your hands are the best mixing tools. Toss lightly to distribute the sauce, but don't be tempted to cut the noodles: the Chinese believe long noodles mean long life.

Patricia Yeo is the executive chef at AZ in New York City. ♦

I'm a little wary of spectacular French pastries, which often seem to be more style than substance. Given a choice, I'll take a simple tart packed with plump fresh apricot halves over a chef's multi-layered chocolate creation any day. For me, flavor and texture count far more than glamorous looks in a dessert. Maybe that's why I love clafoutis (pronounced CLAH-foo-TEE), the rustic dessert from the cherry-producing Limoges region in central France. When prepared just right, which takes a matter of minutes, the result is an irresistible combination—a golden, lightly crunchy crust and a creamy interior studded with juicy bursts of fruit.

To Limousins, clafoutis is synonymous with cherries, especially the tart black ones that grow there in late summer, but in the rest of France, people use the word “clafoutis” more loosely, probably because



“Be sure your fruit is ripe and fragrant,” says Rosa Jackson.

A French Country Dessert Showcases Seasonal Fruit

Clafoutis pairs fresh or dried fruit with a tender batter for a rustic, quick-to-make dessert

BY ROSA JACKSON



No need to be neat. Just toss in the fruit and spread it into an even layer.

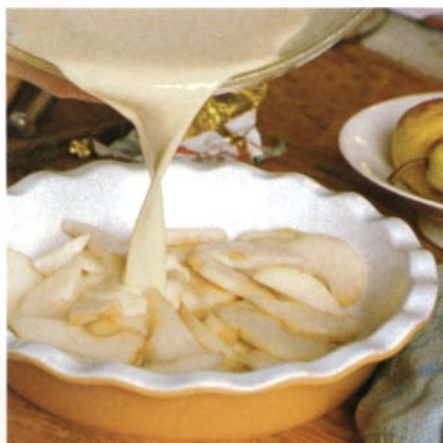
they want to eat clafoutis more often than just during the brief cherry season. I make it all year round with all sorts of fruit: apricots, pineapple, pears, fresh figs, even meltingly sweet prunes.

Clafoutis is deceptively straightforward. Really, it's just a batter poured over fruit and then baked so it puffs up like a kind of sweet Yorkshire pudding. But like most simple things, attention to detail takes it from the ho-hum to the exceptional. I tried many versions before I was satisfied that my clafoutis was as moist and as flavorful as it could get. And though I know clafoutis will never be glamorous, I also wanted it to look beautiful in a homey way.

The fruit's the star, so choose carefully and treat it right

Because a clafoutis can only be as good as its main ingredient, I use fruits at their prime. In spring, I choose sweet (never starchy) apricots, sometimes dotting them with raspberries for contrast. Of course, there are plump cherries—I stick to tradition and leave the pits in for the slight almond flavor they impart. In summer I've made it with red currants for an unusual scarlet variation: the berries burst, releasing their tart juice into the batter. Pears are perfect in fall, but they must be just ripe without being too soft and juicy. When the weather turns cold, I like fragrant pineapple or *pruneaux d'Agen*, those very soft and sweet French prunes.

Juicy fruits need special treatment. Cut fruits, such as apricots or plums, and extremely juicy ones like pineapple need special handling so they don't make the batter soggy. A tip I learned when making tarts in cooking school was to place fruits cut side up so that some of their moisture evaporates in the heat of the oven. Another possibility is to bake the fruit alone for a few minutes, which dries it slightly, before adding it to the batter. Or you can caramelize it, as I



The batter is thin, like crêpe batter, so it's easy to pour.



Butter for rich flavor, almonds for crunch. These are the only adornments to this homey dessert.

do with pineapple, which stops it from releasing much more juice.

A little butter adds richness, gentle handling promotes a perfect puff

Many clafoutis recipes call for eggs, milk, and sometimes cream, but no butter. When developing the recipe for clafoutis with pineapple, I found that the butter-and-sugar caramel added moisture and depth of flavor to the batter. But I didn't think of adding butter to other variations until I tasted a friend's moist and utterly addictive clafoutis made with tart green-gage plums. Her recipe held an invaluable tip: add a little melted butter to the batter, and then dot the top of the clafoutis with knobs of cold butter just before putting it in the oven so it melts as the clafoutis cooks.

You can adapt the batter to the fruit. I find that a rich, creamy batter works best with more acidic fruits like pineapple, while a lighter batter made with milk and cream or whole milk alone suits sweeter fruits such as figs or pears. I also like to flavor the batter with spices such as vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, or cardamom and add alcohol that complements the fruit: Poire William with pear, Armagnac with prunes, Calvados with apples, rum with pineapple.



Golden brown, with a pleasingly puffy edge, this clafoutis will taste best warm, not hot.

Figs are best, I think, when rolled in perfumed honey before placing them in the dish. Sometimes, with pears or prunes, I sprinkle sliced almonds on top for a decorative touch. But the embellishments should never overpower the fruit itself.

Mix the batter by hand—it's quicker than using a machine. Some recipes suggest using a food processor or blender to make clafoutis. This works fine, but clafoutis is so very simple to make that I now think using any kind of electrical appliance only complicates matters. Be careful not to overmix the batter; as with any flour-based mixture, too much agitation can develop the gluten and make your clafoutis tough.

Use moderate heat for a more even rise. Clafoutis has an alarming habit of rising unevenly during cooking, with the edges puffing up first. I've found that it rises most evenly in a moderate oven, 350° to 375°F. The edges will still rise first, but they won't be overcooked before the center has had a chance to puff up and turn golden as well. The clafoutis should reach a uniform height before you remove it from the oven, when it will fall—disappointing, but unavoidable. I tested the following recipes in an ordinary shallow 9-inch cake pan to show that any special equipment is entirely optional. But I think clafoutis is at its most appealing when baked in a deep porcelain pie dish. *(Recipes follow.)*



A whisk works best to gently blend the flour and eggs.



Brown sugar adds a mellow sweetness to the pineapple, giving the clafoutis a complex blend of flavors.

Caramelized Pineapple Clafoutis

Pineapple makes an unexpectedly light clafoutis, perfect in winter when the selection of fruit is limited. *Serves six.*

- ½ large pineapple (14 to 16 oz., peeled)**
- 4 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- ¼ cup light brown sugar**
- 3 large eggs**
- ⅓ cup sugar**
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour**
- ⅔ cup heavy or whipping cream**
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract, or better yet the seeds from ½ split vanilla bean**
- 1 Tbs. rum**

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 9-inch cake or pie pan.

Cut the half pineapple lengthwise into four wedges. Cut the core from each wedge, cut each wedge lengthwise again to make wedges about 1 inch wide, and then cut each of these crosswise into ½-inch slices.

Put the butter in a large frying pan over medium-high heat (ideally large enough to hold the pineapple in one layer). When it sizzles, add the pineapple. Give the pan a shake and then let the pineapple release its juices without stirring. Let the liquid bubble and evaporate, giving the pineapple only the occasional shake and stir. When most of the liquid has evaporated (after about 5 min.), add the brown sugar and stir again. Let the sugar bubble for about 30 seconds and then remove the pan from the heat. With a slotted spoon, transfer the pineapple to the prepared cake pan; reserve the juices in the pan.



In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and sugar until lightly frothy and the sugar is dissolved. Sprinkle or sift in the flour and whisk until smooth. Add the cream, vanilla, and rum; whisk again. Finally, add the juices from the pineapple and give the mixture one last stir.

Pour the batter over the pineapple. Bake in the hot oven until evenly puffed and golden and a skewer comes out clean, about 50 min. Serve warm.

Clafoutis with Prunes & Armagnac

Vanilla sugar is just what it sounds like: a vanilla-scented sugar, good for finishing desserts. It's common in Europe but sometimes hard to find here; the clafoutis will taste just fine without it. *Serves six.*

- 1 cup pitted prunes, snipped in half**
- 2 Tbs. Armagnac, Cognac, or dark rum**
- 3 large eggs**
- ⅓ cup sugar**
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour**
- ⅛ tsp. ground cinnamon**
- ¼ cup heavy or whipping cream**
- ½ cup whole milk**
- 4 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 1 Tbs. vanilla sugar (optional)**

In a bowl, soak the prunes in the Armagnac for about an hour, stirring occasionally. Heat the oven to 375°F. Butter a 9-inch cake or pie pan.

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and sugar until lightly frothy and the sugar is dissolved. Sprinkle or sift in the flour and cinnamon; whisk until smooth. Gradually add the cream and milk, whisking just until smooth. Melt 2 Tbs. of the butter and stir it into the batter.

Arrange the prunes in the prepared cake pan. If there's any unabsorbed Armagnac, sprinkle it over the prunes. Pour the batter over the fruit and dot it with small bits of the remaining 2 Tbs. butter.

Bake until evenly puffed and golden brown and a skewer comes out clean, about 40 min. Immediately sprinkle with the vanilla sugar. Serve warm.

Pear Clafoutis with Almonds

Poire William, a pear eau de vie, is an excellent flavoring for this clafoutis. *Serves six.*

- 2 medium pears (about 12 oz. total)**
- 2 Tbs. pear eau de vie, such as Poire William**
- 3 large eggs**
- ⅓ cup sugar**
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour**
- Pinch freshly grated nutmeg**
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract, or better yet the seeds from ½ split vanilla bean**
- ¼ cup heavy or whipping cream**
- ½ cup whole milk**
- 3 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- ¼ cup sliced almonds**

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 9-inch cake or pie pan.

Peel the pears and cut them in half. Remove the core and any fibers and cut the halves into ¼-inch slices. Put the slices in the prepared cake pan. Sprinkle them with the eau de vie and toss to coat; spread them in a fairly even layer.

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and sugar until lightly frothy and the sugar is dissolved. Sprinkle or sift in the flour and nutmeg and add the vanilla. Whisk until smooth. Gradually add the cream and milk, whisking just until smooth. Melt 2 Tbs. of the butter and stir it into the batter. Pour the batter over the fruit, sprinkle the almonds on top, and dot the surface with bits of the remaining 1 Tbs. butter.

Bake until evenly puffed and brown and a skewer comes out clean, about 40 min. Serve warm.

Rosa Jackson is a food writer living in Paris. In 1994, she traded her native Canada for France to attend Le Cordon Bleu cooking school, where she worked as an interpreter. ♦

Making Real Moroccan Couscous

Steaming the granules of semolina and rubbing them by hand helps them swell to their full potential

BY MOHAMED BEN MCHABCHEB

As a boy growing up in my native city of Sala in Morocco, I lived for couscous. And I always knew when someone in the neighborhood was making it. A familiar aroma would fill the air around the house and beyond. It would come and go, each time with a different blend of alluring smells: cinnamon and saffron, ginger and coriander, simmering lamb, squash and peppers, all carried in the steam of the couscous. It was too much to take. I would run straight home and ask, “When are we making couscous?”

In Moroccan homes, making couscous is an expression of love, generosity, and hospitality. The process feels both celebratory and communal; it’s a good dish around which to build a cooking party. I tend to approach a couscous-making day sort of as I do Thanksgiving. Yes, the preparations and cooking will occupy a chunk of my time, but the work isn’t especially intricate, and I know that anyone who happens to be around the house will want to be part of the action. The most group-oriented step, and the one that’s the most fun (kids will love it), occurs when the pellets are steamed over simmering water or broth and then separated and fluffed by hand—not once, not twice, but three times.

In my opinion, there’s no substitute for steaming the couscous. I can imagine what you’re thinking: “But the directions on the couscous box say to pour boiling water over the granules and let them sit for a mere five minutes.” I don’t deny that such “soaked” grains are edible, but to me, they are dead grains, grains that never had a chance to grow. By steaming and aerating



the couscous the traditional way, the granules absorb a lot more moisture. This takes some time, but you’ll be rewarded with plumper, more tender grains.

The best way to see this difference is to do a side-by-side test. Steam the couscous the way I do (see the photos on pp. 55–56) and then cook up a small amount the five-minute way. You’ll quickly notice that the steamed couscous has more volume and fragrance, and that it’s dramatically softer, fluffier, and lighter. The steamed couscous granules seem to be multidimensional, too, like tiny individual jewels rather than lumpy, wet grains of sand. *(Continued)*

Lamb broth richly seasoned with cinnamon and saffron is the final touch for couscous with root vegetables.



No *couscoussière*? No problem. A colander and stockpot function just as well for steaming the couscous.

Any couscous you find in the store can be steamed, even if it's packaged as instant. Commercial couscous is made by mixing ground semolina with water to form a crumbly dough, which is then rolled into granules. The granules are steamed, and the couscous is then dried and sifted. (It's possible to make couscous granules from other types of grains, too, such as corn, millet, or barley, but these are less common.) Back in the old days, my mother would make her couscous granules from scratch, rolling the semolina flour by hand, pushing and sifting the mixture through a woven colander, and then letting the pellets dry in the sun. The sifting sounded something like "skss, skss," which may explain how the granules (and the dish itself) got their name.

You'll need a colander that sits snugly above a stockpot

To steam the couscous, Moroccans use a two-part vessel called a *couscoussière*. It consists of a deep pot (a *bourma*) and a flat-based colander (a *kesskess*) that sits snugly above the pot. The pot holds the simmering broth, meat, and vegetables, while the couscous steams in the colander upstairs. If you have a *couscoussière* in your closet, this is your big chance. Otherwise, it's easy to rig one up using a stockpot and a colander. Choose a colander with holes on the bottom only (not the sides), if possible. A Chinese bamboo steamer works well, too, as long as it's the right size (just slightly wider than the pot so there's almost no overhang).

It's also important that the colander fits tightly inside the pot; there shouldn't be much of a gap between the rims. The idea is to minimize any spaces or holes where steam can escape; you want to force the steam to rise through the couscous. To help accomplish this, I like to seal the seam between the colander and the pot with cheesecloth or a strip of old towel that has been dipped into a flour and water glue.

The only other piece of equipment you'll need is a very large shallow bowl or a roasting pan in which to fluff the couscous between steamings.

Moisten and aerate the couscous by sprinkling with liquid and rubbing

It's traditional to steam the couscous over the simmering broth, but it's fine (and probably easier the first few times), to steam it over boiling water and to deal with the broth and vegetables separately.

To start, cover the granules with cold water, swish them around, and then immediately pour off the water. This initial soak releases some starch so the granules won't be as sticky. Then dribble the couscous into the colander set over the pot of boiling water, letting the granules mound gently. Some

Make a savory lamb broth



In a large bowl, combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the olive oil with the onions, spices, salt, and garlic; mix well.



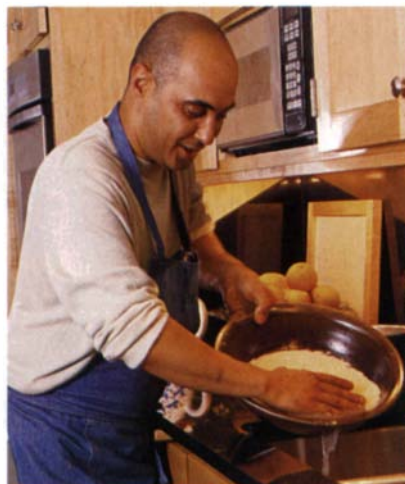
Heat the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil in a stockpot over medium-high heat. Season the shanks with salt and pepper and brown them on all sides (in batches, if necessary). Reduce the heat to medium and add the seasoned onion mixture, stirring occasionally, until the spices release their flavors and aromas, about 5 minutes.



Add the tomatoes, turnips, and red pepper, stir to coat, and cook until the tomatoes are soft, 5 to 8 minutes. Add the bay leaf, tied herbs, and water to cover by 1 inch (10 to 12 cups). Cover the pot and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the lamb pulls off the bone easily, $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Transfer the lamb to a platter and cover with foil. Continue simmering the broth until it's full-flavored and reduced to about 8 cups. Taste and add salt and pepper as necessary. Remove the *bouquet garni*, bay leaf, and cinnamon stick. Spoon off the fat that collects on the surface.

Prepare to steam the couscous

In a medium bowl, mix the flour and water to make a thin paste; set aside, along with a strip of cheesecloth to wrap around the rim of your *couscoussière* (or a colander that rests securely above the rim of a deep pot without too much of a gap).



Put the couscous in a very large bowl or a roasting pan. Cover the grains with cold water, swishing to remove the starch. Drain immediately. Let the couscous rest for 5 minutes.



Meanwhile, make the seasoned water by mixing together the oil, saffron, turmeric, cumin, salt, pepper, and 3 cups of water. Fill the pot (or the *couscoussière*) with 2 inches of plain water (which shouldn't touch the bottom of the colander); bring to a boil.



As the plain water is heating up, scoop up some of the couscous with your hands and rub the grains together lightly to separate them and break up any lumps. The couscous will feel dry. Sprinkle on a bit of the seasoned water and continue to separate and fluff the couscous with your hands, letting the grains rub against one another and dribble back into the bowl. Sprinkle on a bit more of the liquid and continue rubbing so the couscous starts to feel moist but not wet (no liquid should accumulate in the bowl); you'll use about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the liquid.

people line the colander with cheesecloth, but unless the holes are very large (like in a Chinese steamer), I find that it usually isn't necessary, even when the holes are larger than the couscous granules. Try to sprinkle the granules so they cover all the holes in the colander, but don't press on them. Seal the seam with the cloth dipped in the flour and water paste.

The first steaming is finished when vapor rises through the couscous. At that point, dump out the couscous into a very large shallow bowl or a roasting pan, breaking up clumps with a spoon to release heat.

When the couscous is cool enough to handle, rub the granules to aerate and separate them. Scoop up a handful of couscous and rub the granules against one another lightly, letting them dribble back into the bowl. The granules, not your hands, should touch each other. Gradually sprinkle on some water seasoned with saffron and cumin and continue rubbing, being careful not to drown the couscous by adding too much liquid at once. You don't want any liquid to pool in the bowl, and the grains should feel just barely moist, never wet or clumpy. If they feel wet, stop adding liquid. Rake your hands through the granules occasionally to check for any lumps that you may have missed.

The couscous then goes back into the colander and gets steamed and fluffed two more times. After

the last round, the once-shriveled pellets will have swollen to three times their size.

A full-flavored broth cooks the vegetables

The couscous itself, while tender and light, doesn't have too much flavor, so it's customary to serve it with seasonal vegetables and a rich meat broth. I like using lamb shanks for the broth because they contain a lot of flavor and gelatin, which produce a full-bodied broth. If you can't find shanks, use lamb shoulder; its tough collagen fibers will break down and become tender during the long cooking.

The broth needs to simmer for a good long time. When the lamb pulls off the bone easily, remove it from the broth and then continue simmering the liquid until it reduces by about half. The reduction intensifies and thickens the broth. There's no need to strain out the aromatic vegetables; they contribute flavor and texture. You'll use this rich broth to moisten the couscous after the final round of steaming, to cook the vegetables, and to serve in individual bowls alongside the couscous at the table. (Continued)

Make the spicy harissa

See the ingredient list on p. 57. Coarsely chop the roasted peppers and put them in a blender. Add the chiles (but not the seeds), garlic, cumin, coriander, and salt. With the blender running, pour in the olive oil in a stream until the mixture becomes smooth, about 30 seconds. Transfer the *harissa* to a bowl and stir in the chile seeds.

Steam and fluff the couscous twice, and then steam again



Set the colander over the simmering water. Sprinkle the couscous into the colander (or the *couscoussière* steamer) without pressing on the grains.



Seal the seam between the colander and the pot by dipping a long strip of wet cheesecloth (or old towel) in the flour-water paste. Wrap the soaked cheesecloth around the gap twice (once, if using a towel). Cook until steam appears through the entire surface of the couscous, 10 to 20 minutes. Reduce the heat to very low. Unwrap the cheesecloth (be careful—it's hot).



Dump the couscous into the large bowl; break up clumps with a spoon. When the couscous is cool enough to handle, fluff again as shown on p. 55, moistening it gradually with about 1 cup of the liquid. Repeat the steaming and fluffing. Steam once more and proceed to the third photo on p. 57. During steaming, cook the onions and vegetables (next section).

With one exception, any root vegetable is a good choice for cooking in the broth: sweet potato, turnip, parsnip, and carrots are all excellent. The exception is ordinary potato, which is too bland. I might also hesitate before serving couscous with beets; they taste great, but you'll end up with crimson couscous.

Boil the vegetables until they're extremely tender. In my mother's house, we would throw all the vegetables into the broth at the same time and boil them until they were so soft they could be mashed into a purée. Don't scoff. These super-tender vegetables actually have a lot of flavor and blend well with the couscous. At my restaurant, I take a little more care with the timing. I add the sturdiest vegetables first (here it's the carrots, sweet potatoes, and winter squash) and the fastest-cooking last.

As a final garnish, I'll serve a bowl of spicy *harissa*, a creamy blend of chiles and roasted red peppers. It's a cinch to make in the blender. And to highlight the sweeter side of the dish, I might also caramelize some thinly sliced onions in a skillet with cinnamon, sugar, and raisins, and then arrange the mixture around the ring of couscous on the serving platter.

RECIPE

Couscous with Lamb & Vegetables

Look for couscous in bulk at Middle Eastern markets or else use any packaged couscous in the supermarket. You can make the broth up to two days ahead. *Serves ten. Yields 12 cups of couscous and 1½ cups harissa.*

FOR THE LAMB BROTH:

- ½ cup olive oil, plus 3 Tbs. for sautéing
- 2 large onions, thinly sliced
- Large pinch saffron (about 30 threads or ½ tsp., lightly packed)
- 1 Tbs. ground ginger
- 1 stick cinnamon
- 1 Tbs. ground coriander
- 1 Tbs. paprika
- 2 tsp. cracked black pepper; more for the shanks
- 2 tsp. coarse salt; more for the shanks
- 6 medium cloves garlic, crushed and coarsely chopped
- 3 lb. lamb shanks (2 or 3 shanks)
- 2 tomatoes, cut in large dice
- 2 small turnips (or 2 parsnips), peeled and cut in large dice
- 1 large red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut in 1-inch pieces
- 1 bay leaf

While steaming the couscous, cook the onions and vegetables



While the couscous is steaming, heat the olive oil in a skillet on medium high. Add the sliced onions, cinnamon, pepper, salt, sugar, and raisins. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are soft and caramelized, about 20 minutes; set aside.

As the couscous steams for the second time, bring the lamb broth back to a boil and add the carrots, sweet potato, and squash. Simmer for 10 minutes and then add the cabbage and eggplant. Simmer the vegetables for another 10 minutes. Meanwhile, pull the lamb meat off the



shanks, discarding the fat and bones. Cut the lamb into bite-size pieces. Add the zucchini to the broth and simmer until all the vegetables are tender, about 10 minutes more. Return the lamb to the broth to moisten and reheat it. Taste and add salt and pepper, if needed.

Bring it all together



When the couscous is finished steaming the third time, dump it into the large bowl or pan and break up clumps with a spoon. Stir in the chickpeas, raisins, cinnamon, and butter. When the couscous is cool enough to touch, moisten and season the grains with about 1 cup of the lamb broth, using the same rubbing technique as before.

Heap the couscous on a platter. Clear a hole in the center by pushing the grains toward the perimeter. With a slotted spoon, arrange the lamb and vegetables in the center, leaving some of them in the broth. Serve with the *harissa* (p. 55), the caramelized



onions, and individual bowls of broth, which people can sprinkle on their couscous to their taste.

10 sprigs each of fresh cilantro and flat-leaf parsley, tied with kitchen twine

FOR THE HARISSA (SEE THE BOX ON P. 55):

2 roasted (or grilled) red bell peppers, skinned, stemmed, and seeded
5 dried red chiles, soaked in hot water for 20 min., drained, stemmed, and seeded (reserve the seeds)
2 cloves garlic
2 tsp. ground cumin
½ tsp. ground coriander
½ tsp. coarse salt
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

FOR THE COUSCOUS & SEASONED WATER:

2 cups flour mixed with 2 cups water, to seal the pot
1½ lb. (4 cups) couscous
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Large pinch saffron (about 30 threads), crushed or pulverized
½ tsp. ground turmeric
1 tsp. ground cumin
2 tsp. coarse salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 can (15 oz.) chickpeas, drained
½ cup golden raisins
½ tsp. ground cinnamon; more as needed
2 Tbs. unsalted butter

FOR THE CARAMELIZED ONIONS:

3 Tbs. olive oil
2 large onions, thinly sliced
2 tsp. ground cinnamon
2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
Coarse salt to taste (about 1 tsp.)
2 Tbs. sugar
1 cup golden raisins

FOR THE VEGETABLES:

8 baby carrots, peeled (or 2 small carrots, peeled and cut in 1-inch pieces)
1 large sweet potato (8 oz.), peeled and cut in 1-inch chunks
1 lb. winter squash, peeled, seeded, and cut in 1-inch chunks
¼ medium white cabbage, cut into 1-inch pieces (4 cups)
6 baby eggplant (or ½ medium globe eggplant), cut in 1-inch pieces (about 3 cups)
4 small zucchini (12 oz. total), halved lengthwise and cut in 1-inch pieces

For the method, read through the text and then follow the photos and captions starting on p. 54.

Mohamed Ben Mchabcheb is the chef and owner of L'Olive restaurant in Chicago. ♦

Cater Your Own

Strategies and tips from the experts, and from one first-timer who pulled it off herself

BY SARAH JAY

When my sister Loretta came to me for help in finding a caterer for her wedding, I researched a few leads, and then I had a brainstorm: why couldn't I be the caterer? I love to cook, and this would be a unique and memorable gift. Making the food myself would also be right in tune with the intimate event she had in mind: just 35 people, with the ceremony taking place in the backyard of her new home.

Loretta didn't greet the idea with as much enthusiasm as I had hoped, but eventually she agreed to let me do it. I was thrilled...until the panic set in. What had I gotten myself into? This was a huge undertaking, with dozens of details to oversee, and the pressure was on to get it right.

Thanks to a lot of planning and probably a good dose of beginner's luck, I managed to carry it off. And my once-skeptical sister now tells me that the homemade food made the day extra special. But it would have gone a lot smoother had I known at the start what I ended up learning along the way, and had I had at my disposal the many tricks and strategies that professional caterers rely on every day. (You'll find a lot of their tips in the sidebar starting on the opposite page.)

So if you're a passionate cook and have ever toyed with the idea of preparing the food for a large party, say 35 to 50 people, I encourage you to seize the opportunity when it arises (it could be a friend's bridal shower, a child's graduation, or parents' anniversary). As a survivor, I am here to say that it can be done, though not without a tremendous amount of forethought, plenty of hard work, and

Keep lists—
from shopping to
cleanup, they'll
force you to keep
track of everything
you'll need.

GRILL/LAWN G

Grill
grill kit:
Charcoal
chimney starter
Newspaper
Matches
Aluminum Foil
Tongs
Grill Brush

Cleanup Kit:
Sponges
Brooms
Laundry Bag
Antacid



Be efficient. Pack all related items in one crate or box—here, it's the buffet table accessories.

perhaps a few jitters. What follows is a guide to making it happen.

Step one: Get organized, while there's still time to think

Get organized at the beginning and stay organized through the end. Sit down with pen and paper (or keyboard and monitor) and clarify the basics: what's the occasion? what's your budget? what's your time frame? who and how many are the guests? where and when will the event take place? indoors or out? how formal? what type of meal? The answers to these questions establish a sort of party mission statement, and they'll guide you on the smaller decisions to come.

Lists, lists, and more lists. Once you firm up the menu (more on that in a minute), list every ingredient you'll need, consolidating items that appear in more than one recipe. I had several shopping lists, one for food I needed to special-order, like the leg of lamb and the salmon fillet, another for nonperishables and pantry items, which I bought far in advance, and a third list for perishables. If your

Big Party

CONTINGENCIES + EXTRAS

Umbrellas
Waiters' Rags
Extra Serving Utensils
Masking Tape
Marker Pens + ID Cards
Extension Cords
Flashlight
First Aid Kit
Ziploc Bags
Paper Towels

FRIDAY SHOP

PERISHABLES + PRODUCE

~~Basil~~ → 1 c. + $\frac{3}{4}$ c. + garnish = (2 c.)
~~Mint~~ → 1 c. + 2 Tbs. + 1 c. + garnish = (2 c.)
~~Parsley~~ → 1 c. + garnish = (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ c.)
~~Thyme~~ → 1 tp. + 15 sprigs = (20 sprigs)
~~Marguerite~~ → (2 lbs.)
Fresh Savory → (5 tp.)
~~Rosemary~~ → 1 sprig + garnish = (4 sprigs)
Cherry Tomatoes → (2 $\frac{1}{2}$ c.)
Red Bell Pepper → (1 $\frac{1}{4}$ c.)
Scallions → (1 bunch)
Fennel → (12 bulbs)
~~Tomatoes~~ → 5 tomatoes + 4 lbs. = (6 lbs.)

Smart tips from the catering experts

I asked professional caterers for their best strategies. Some of the following tips are second nature to any experienced caterer, and others are inventive solutions to a particular challenge.

On getting organized

◆ If the party doesn't already have a theme, give it one.

The theme doesn't need to be obvious to the guests. It can be simply a guiding principle, say, a casual meal to

celebrate the arrival of spring. "A theme helps you narrow down," says Elaine Sterling, who caters in New York City. "It also sets a tone and helps in everything from creating a menu to setting the table."

◆ Shop ahead as much as possible, both to conserve your energy and to avoid interruptions in your prep time.

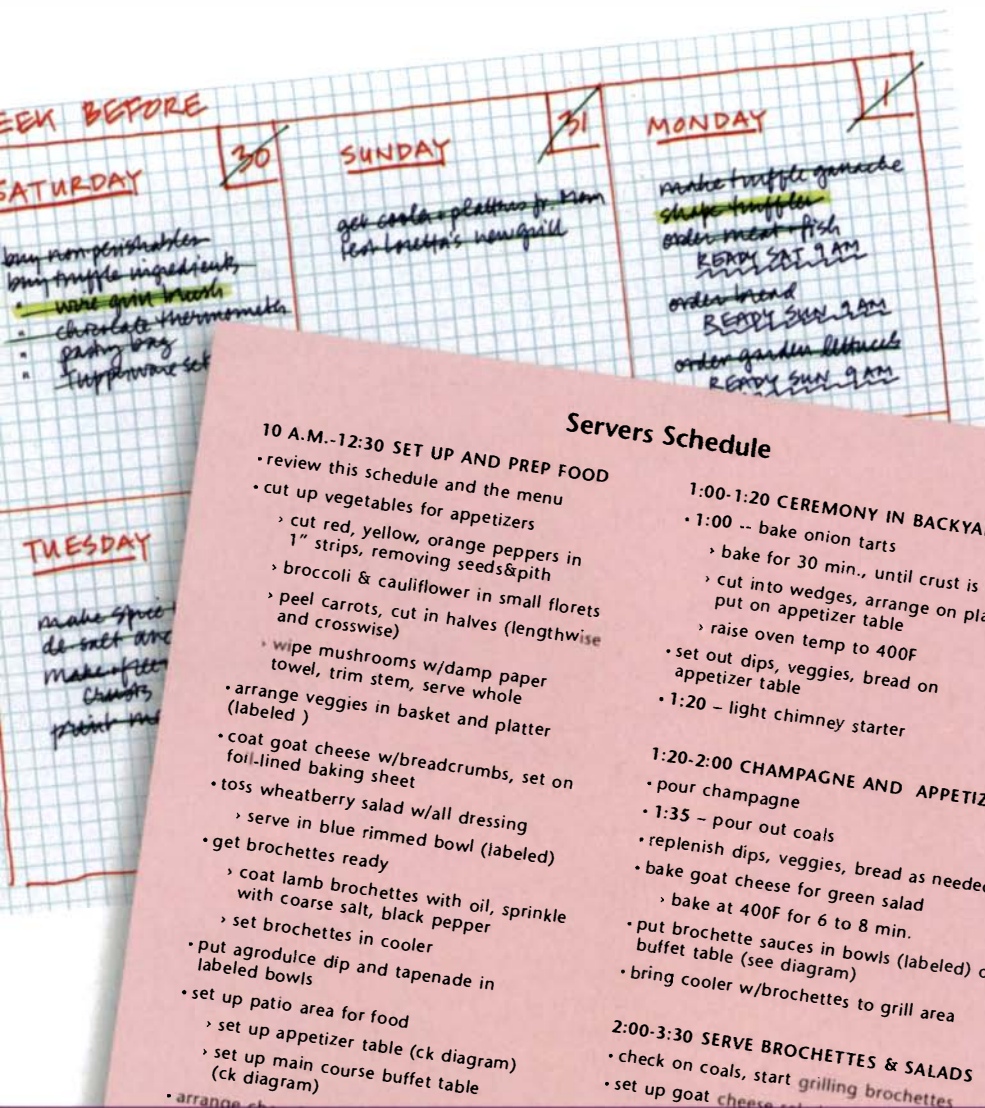
◆ List all the nonfood items as well as food. Barbara Hom, who owns Night Owl Catering in Sebastopol, Cali-

fornia, carries several lists to her jobs: a grill equipment list; a bar list; a buffet table and appetizer list; a list for supplies (like paper towels, aprons, zip-top bags); and a list for service utensils (ladles and ice-cube tongs).

◆ Give false deadlines to others. This gives you a built-in window for unexpected delays. If you must have that rented grill by Saturday, tell the company to deliver on Friday. If you plan to pick up the bread from the baker at

noon, tell him you need it ready at 9 A.M.

◆ Figure a drop-dead time into your schedule. In her book, *Comfortable Entertaining*, Nathalie Dupree recommends setting a time, usually a few hours before guests arrive, which will be your last chance to change plans. "At drop-dead time, you stop fussing, make a decision, and stick to it," she writes. "Now is when you say, 'It's too late to iron the tablecloth or make a second dip for the vegetables.'"



Make detailed work plans, including every minor task so nothing is left to chance.

recipes call for it, make a list for produce that needs time to ripen, like bananas, avocados, or pears.

Create a plan of action. To see how I'd get everything done, I made a calendar and assigned every task to a specific day: shopping trips, equipment purchases (I needed a chocolate thermometer to make truffles), all the cooking, and miscellaneous jobs, such as doing a test run on my sister's grill. As the party got closer, my schedule grew more detailed. Saturday, my big prep day, started out like this:

9 to 10 A.M.—Pick up chicken and lamb from butcher; pick up salmon from fish shop.

10 A.M. to 1 P.M.—Simmer wheatberries; prep veggies for wheatberry salad; make wheatberry dressing; make green salad dressing; start goat cheese marinating; make rosemary oil.

Be realistic about how much you can get done in a block of time, and don't overlook time-consuming chores like washing dishes and packing the food for transport. Add a "fudge factor" to compensate for your scheduling miscalculations and to allow for late-breaking crises.

For party day, my timeline was extremely specific, with time budgeted for showering and changing into my dress, as well as any last-

On creating a menu

♦ **For variety, choose dishes with different temperatures, textures, flavors, and colors.** Besides being boring, a menu composed only of hot dishes will overwhelm your oven. By the same token, all cold dishes means a very full refrigerator. Consider making one hot dish, one cold one, and a selection that can be served at room temperature.

♦ **Consider how people will pick up the food.** Before choosing an entrée that requires a knife and fork to eat, determine whether there will be tables and chairs for people to sit down. If people will be

standing while eating, choose finger food, or what Barbara Hom calls "grazing food." If guests will be balancing plates on their laps, make food that's fork-friendly and that doesn't need a knife.

♦ **Evaluate your kitchen resources.** How much can your stove produce? How much can you refrigerate? Paula LeDuc, a caterer in Emeryville, California, figured this out the hard way. In her early catering days, she decided to make sausages in brioche for 500. Her Cuisinart survived batch after batch of brioche dough, but her fridge couldn't keep pace. Before long, the dough

was forcing open the refrigerator door. (She had to rope it shut for the next five hours.)

♦ **To avoid getting exhausted and making errors, choose simple recipes over fussy ones.** There's a limit to your own stamina. "Most people tire after a certain amount of prepping," warns Carol Durst, who teaches catering courses in New York City. "Just the fatigue factor will make them make mistakes."

♦ **Prepare a whole item rather than individual servings.** It's easy to underestimate how long it takes to prepare individual servings. "You don't want to

be boning and stuffing fifty chicken thighs the night before the party," Elaine Sterling says. "It's much easier to butterfly a filet mignon, fill it with herbs, and roll it up into a roulade." Instead of making fifty individual tartlets for dessert, make five large tarts that each serve ten.

♦ **Consider using high-quality prepared food.** It's okay to buy good puff pastry dough or a demi-glace base for a soup or sauce. If you have a source for superb poached salmon, garnish it to make it your own. Instead of buying several heads of lettuce and washing them yourself, use baby garden lettuces, cleaned and ready to serve.

minute food prep. Schedule down-time, too. For example, I gave myself a full hour to do nothing except say hello to guests and catch my breath. To time the final cooking so the food is ready when you need it, work backwards from serving time: for example, the onion tarts are being served at 1:30, so they go in the oven at 1:00, and the oven gets heated at 12:45.

To keep track of your schedules and lists, create a folder and maybe get a clipboard.

Step two: Compose an exciting yet realistic menu, heavy on the do-ahead

For a large party, it's sensible, if not essential, to serve a buffet. A seated dinner will likely be too complicated to choreograph well. For my sister's midday buffet, I chose simple dishes that I loved and had made before, and that I expected would have wide appeal among the guests. (Several of the recipes came from *Fine Cooking* articles; see them at our web site, www.finecooking.com.)

Nothing too fancy or unfamiliar. If you're determined to include a new recipe, do a practice run a few weeks before or have a backup plan. The one unknown on my menu was a maple syrup cheesecake that might or might not have worked, a risk I could af-

How much food to make?

It's impossible to give an exact answer to this question since it will depend on so many variables, including the kind of food you're making, the time of the party, and where and how people will eat. Keep in mind that when people serve themselves, as at a buffet, they tend to eat more. But at the same time, a buffet table usually offers more types of

food than a sit-down meal, so people eat smaller portions of each dish.

Start by checking your recipes' yields to get a sense of how many each will serve. As a guideline, Barbara Hom figures that for a dinnertime party, each person will eat a total of about a pound of food. That concept can be hard to translate into actual portions, especially if you're

serving a lot of small dishes, as you might for an hors d'oeuvres party. In that case, she counts on 20 "bites" per person for a dinnertime event (14 "bites" for a lunchtime party). So if you're making five different appetizers, make enough so every guest can have four of each type. And for a dish that's likely to be everyone's favorite, make a little extra.

ford because the mother of the groom was supplying the "real" dessert, a Russian cake from her favorite Brooklyn bakery. As it turned out, the cheesecake stole the show, but had it failed, I was covered.

Do-ahead recipes. The goal is to have nearly everything prepared ahead, so look for recipes that are completely make-ahead or that have make-ahead components, items like stocks, tomato sauces, herb butters, cookie doughs, and cake layers. Even roasted peppers stored in oil can be made and frozen weeks ahead. Pastry and phyllo dough also freeze beautifully.

Step three: Scope out the party site

Early on, visit the party location. Even if it's in your own home, you need to ask the following questions:

◆ Make dessert a winner.

"The last memory of the event is critical," says Paula LeDuc. She sends her guests home with a gift: perhaps a jar of homemade jam or a bag of cookies. "If baking isn't your forte or your love," says Carol Durst, "then get part or all of dessert done by someone else."

On prepping and cooking

◆ Make "kits" for each recipe.

After breaking down her recipes into do-ahead parts, Barbara Hom puts all the components into one box and calls it a kit. "I just did a Thai chicken curry," Barbara explains. "My

'kit' included coconut milk, which was already transferred from the can into a Tupperware container, the chopped galangal, the measured sugar in a zip-top bag, and the chicken and Thai eggplant cut in pieces. So at the party, it took me five minutes to make a curry for sixty people."

◆ Look for overlapping elements in recipes. If you see that three recipes call for chopped onions, do all the chopping at once.

◆ Slightly undercook food that will get another reheating. If the previously blanched asparagus will be

reheated in broth, for example, it helps to undercook it a bit the first time around.



◆ Make a photocopy of each recipe. Keep the copy in your party folder, mark it up with notes, and post it on the refrigerator or tape it to a cabinet above your prep area for easy reference.

On making the most of your refrigerator

◆ Eliminate nonessentials.

Many items, like Tabasco, jams, and capers, won't suffer from a few days at room temperature. Eat or toss out leftovers, and anything else that you won't be using immediately.

◆ Get rid of food bulk and wrappers. Remove packaging from food before storing it, and consider making the food itself into space-saving shapes. Carol Durst halves red peppers and stacks the halves inside each other (trimming any slimy edge before using them later).

MENU

Black Olive Tapenade and
Green Agrodulce Dip with Crudité

Bruschetta Rubbed with Tomato

Olives and Manchego Cheese

Onion Tarts

Wheatberry Salad

Green Salad with Baked Goat Cheese
and Sherry Vinaigrette

Chicken Brochettes with
Moroccan Spice Rub and Rosemary Oil

Lamb Brochettes
with Olive Mint Vinaigrette

Salmon Brochettes

**Keep the menu
simple and
do-ahead so
you're free to
enjoy the party.**

What equipment and tools are available? Check that the site can accommodate your proposed menu. Examine the oven and stovetop—will your baking pans fit? are there enough racks to hold them all? do all the burners and the broiler function? will your huge pasta pot fit next to your big skillet? Open the refrigerator and freezer and evaluate the space there. Then do a thorough inventory of tools, matching up what exists against what you'll need. Are there sharp knives? Peelers? Melon ballers? Pepper grinder? Besides a good bread knife, I needed to cart an electric hand mixer to my sister's house to whip cream. If you're grilling, does the location have a large enough grill? If not, you'll need to rent one. Don't forget the fuel. I had to mail-order a few bags of natural hardwood charcoal several weeks in advance.

Where will everything go? Map out the area, on paper, and establish "battle stations." Designate sites for food storage and preparation, for arranging and garnishing platters, for stashing dirty plates and dish-washing, for putting trash and for setting out the full bags. You'd be surprised how quickly garbage and dirty dishes can pile up and cramp your work area. Where will guests mingle and eat? Is the grill far enough away that it won't be sending smoke into guests' faces? Planning all this in advance minimizes chaos on party day.

How will the food be served? Evaluate the serving area. Is the buffet table big enough for all the food? It can't hurt to sketch a diagram, noting which dish will go where and on what platter. Plan your serving

♦ **Keep things neat.** Square off logs of herb butter or cookie dough before freezing them. They're more space efficient, and they also look neater for serving.

♦ **Collect plastic containers in advance, or else buy a whole set.** If it's convenient, use same-size containers, like pint-size deli tubs or large yogurt containers, to create a level surface for supporting something else.

♦ **Cover everything well.** Airtight storage extends shelf life. Elaine Sterling takes the extra step of putting plastic wrap underneath container lids as

a back-up seal; it also protects from spills if the lid comes off during transport.

♦ **Create alternative cool spots.** Elaine Sterling once turned a small room in her apartment into a walk-in refrigerator by blasting the air conditioning. That wouldn't do for highly perishable foods like fish, but for produce or a cool pastry, it's fine. If it's winter, use the back porch or fire escape.

♦ **Use disposable containers,** such as aluminum lasagne pans, so you don't tie up every pan in your kitchen. Square or rectangular shapes fit better than rounded ones.

♦ **Stock up on zip-top bags.** They hold solids and liquids, they conform to the shape of the food, and they're airtight.

♦ **Invest in a pastry bag** (or else use a zip-top bag) for holding dips or fillings that need to be piped out just before serving. Fill the bag with the dip, close it well, and then refrigerate until needed. If using zip-tops, snip off the corner of the bag and squeeze out the contents.

♦ **Use dry ice** to keep food like ice cream super cold. For most other food, an ice chest filled with ice or cold packs is enough.

♦ **For transporting hors d'oeuvres,** Elaine Sterling uses pizza boxes or takeout containers because they stack so well.

On serving and garnishing

♦ **The color of the serving plate should contrast with the color of the food.** "You don't want a dark platter for your burgers; you need a lighter one," says Irene Khin Wong, the owner of Saffron 59 in New York City. "For our colorful sushis, we use a black platter with a simple liner."

♦ **For a visually stunning buffet table, create height.** For a dramatic and varied

vessels and think about your refilling strategy. Will the replenishing occur at the buffet table, or will there be a composed backup platter ready to go, in which case you'll need twice as many serving platters? Will you serve the salad in the same bowl in which it was tossed, or do you need a second bowl for tossing?

Step four: Get cooking

Finally, it's time to enter the kitchen. My strategy was simple: to prepare and cook the food as early in the week as possible, but not so early that it would sag in flavor, texture, or appearance.

Deconstruct recipes into small, do-ahead steps, and schedule each step as early as you can. For the brochettes, I mixed the spice rub on Tuesday, made the sauces on Saturday morning, and cut up and skewered the meat on Saturday evening. All that remained for the party was to sprinkle the brochettes with salt, pepper, and olive oil before grilling. Clearly label all containers of food with masking tape and indelible pen so it's easily identified when needed: "parsley for salad" or "lemon garnish for fish," for example.

Assemble and garnish as late as possible so the food looks and tastes freshly made. Toss salads with dressing at the last moment. Plan and prepare garnishes in advance, but don't adorn the food until just before serving.

Step five: Hire help for the actual event

I did hire a couple of servers, but if I were to do it again, I would recruit a friend to get me through that

last arduous day of prepping, and especially to help with the washing up. Even if you decide to prepare everything on your own, you'll need extra hands for the actual event. For a simple buffet, figure on one waitperson for every 15 guests.

Hire responsible people who can take direction. Whether you turn to teenagers or experienced waitstaff, look for professionalism, flexibility, and eagerness. Ask about their cooking experience to determine if they can handle the last-minute cooking your menu requires. Give them a copy of the menu in advance. If their attire is important, tell them what to wear.

Give explicit, precise instructions. Provide them with a timeline for the day, with the order of service and specific tasks to accomplish. I found that no detail is too minor to mention. Don't just say "cut up vegetables for crudité." Describe how, such as "peel carrots and cut in half lengthwise and crosswise," or "clean mushrooms with damp paper towels, trim half-inch off stem, and serve whole." And use precise language. My wheatberry salad lacked a little vibrancy because the server added only about half the vinaigrette; I should have said to "toss wheatberry salad with *all* the dressing." Another small but nagging error: my instruction to "slice bread for the caviar very thinly," was interpreted to mean a half-inch thick—not my idea of very thin.

Sarah Jay is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦

The following people and sources were very helpful while researching this story:

Carol Durst, Barbara Hom, Abigail Kirsch, Paula LeDuc, Loren Michelle, Kay Quevedo, Elaine Sterling, and Irene Khin Wong. Also, *Comfortable Entertaining*, by Nathalie Dupree; *Invitation to Dinner*, by Abigail Kirsch; and *The Entertaining Survival Guide*, by Lora Brody.

display, Abigail Kirsch puts serving dishes at different levels, using ordinary household items as supports: flowerpots, heavy cardboard boxes, baking pans, ice buckets. Make the highest point in the middle of the table, or in the back if it's against a wall. Drape linen over the supports (make sure everything is very stable), and put a card over each place reminding you where each dish goes.

♦ Decorate with an herb or an ingredient from the recipe to clue people into the flavor.

"I keep it simple," says Carol Durst. "I don't spend a lot of time carving tomato rosebuds."

♦ **Lay out the buffet table in advance.** To make sure she doesn't miss anything, Abigail Kirsch mentally walks down the table and asks herself, "How do you pick this up? Is there a spoon for the mustard? Does this need a garnish?"

On directing waitstaff

♦ **Use pictures to explain a concept.** When words don't seem clear enough, Kay Quevedo, who owns The Moveable Feast in El Paso, Texas, draws a sketch to show servers how to cut the bread, garnish the salmon, or arrange vegetables on a serving platter.



♦ **Tape notes to each dish** with reheating, assembling, garnishing, and serving instructions.

On getting the house ready

♦ **Clear out the personal items.** "When I go to people's homes, the first thing I do is clear up counter space,"

says Irene Khin Wong. "I always tell the host in advance to remove personal things, like notepads, coffeemakers, juicers, pens."

♦ **Forget about the kitchen garbage can.** It fills up too fast to be practical. Hook a large (30-gallon) plastic trash bag over a drawer instead.

On doing it better the next time

♦ **Learn from experience.** A few days after the party, take some time to write down what worked and what didn't. File that in your party folder and review it before you try this again.

Coconut Desserts

Add the distinctive flavor of coconut with crunchy toasted shreds or a rich, creamy milk

BY KAY CABRERA

As a pastry chef living on the island of Hawaii, I have a proprietary fondness for rich, sweet coconut. I'm still charmed by the *Beware of Falling Coconuts* signs that dot the beaches here, and my own backyard plays host to a lovely, fruit-bearing coconut tree. But when it comes to baking with this favorite flavor of mine, I usually don't bother with a fresh coconut. And I'm not alone. Even in Hawaii, most cooks shy away from using fresh. Why? Though fresh coconut is delicious, it's literally a hard nut to crack. I've seen experienced huskers free a kernel in seconds, but amateurs like me can spend thirty minutes hacking away with a hammer only to end up staring hopelessly at a mess of dirty, fiber-covered, virtually unusable meat.

For those who want to try their hand at it, see *Fine Cooking* #33, p. 39. For the rest of us who would rather cook with coconut than wrestle with it, there are many excellent coconut products available—dried coconut, coconut milk, even coconut extract—that provide authentic flavor without need of a hammer, a screwdriver, persistence, and practice.

Try health-food stores for shredded coconut

Dried (also called desiccated) coconut is the most familiar form of packaged coconut. You can find dried coconut in the supermarket, but you don't often find a variety of sizes, and it's usually sweetened. I tend to avoid sweetened coconut, mainly because it tastes more of sugar than of coconut, but also because I find it has a slightly chemical taste (most brands use preservatives and sulfites to keep the coconut moist and white). Aside from the difference in flavor, sweetened coconut has a higher moisture content so it can't always be substituted when a



Coconut and chocolate: a classic combination.
Shaved coconut adds texture to a buttercream icing.


recipe calls for unsweetened. It will work in a pinch as a garnish, but don't try to substitute sweetened coconut in the macaroon recipe (p. 68); you'll never get the proper result: a crisp, dry exterior that contrasts deliciously with the moist, intensely flavored interior.

I usually head to the health-food store when I need desiccated coconut. That's where you'll find those wonderful large flakes—the size that often turns up in granola. This is what to buy when you want to make a statement. I use the wide flakes in my favorite biscotti, where they stand out noticeably, and to festoon the coconut buttercream icing on my chocolate layer cake (see the recipe on p. 68). I use the small grated coconut for my macaroons and to give brownie and cookie recipes an exotic kick and crunch.

Because of its high fat content, even desiccated coconut can get rancid if stored too long. Be sure to smell—better yet, taste—the coconut before you buy it. Store it in a cool, dry place (it will last about a month, or about a year in the freezer in an airtight container) and taste it again before you use it.

Toast shredded coconut to round out its flavor.
Raw and desiccated coconut take on a beautiful

Photos: Scott Phillips



Toss on the coconut
to give a layer cake
a festive, shaggy
look.

Caramelize the sugar with a torch or your broiler



A small blowtorch gives you total control and works quickly.



The broiler will also do the trick. An ice bath keeps the custard cool while the top browns.



Crème Brûlée is the perfect balance of textures: satiny coconut custard topped with a crisp, crackling sugar shell.

golden color and a deeper flavor when gently toasted. To toast coconut, spread it evenly on a baking sheet and put it in a 350°F oven. Watch it carefully and stir once or twice for even color. Pull it out just as the coconut begins to turn a light brown.

Coconut milk provides rich flavor without the telltale texture

A big part of coconut's appeal for me is its chewy texture. But I know people who, while they like the flavor of coconut, object to how it feels in their mouth. For them, smooth, creamy coconut desserts are the answer. I use coconut milk to flavor custards, ice cream, and sorbet. I use it in icings and to flavor pastry cream.

Coconut milk is not the liquid found within the coconut: it's made from combining coconut meat with hot water (or dairy milk or cream) and straining and squeezing out as much liquid as possible. You can make your own, but canned coconut milk is convenient and is found in most supermarkets, as well as in Asian or Latin American groceries. The Thai products are my favorite: smooth and homogenous. Mendoca's coconut milk from Hawaii is the most like homemade, slightly coarse and separated.

Canned coconut milk will last indefinitely unopened, but once opened is highly susceptible to spoilage. Refrigerate opened coconut milk and freeze what you don't use in a day or two; it will last two months in the freezer. Coconut milk may be substituted in part for liquids in baking, but be aware that it can curdle without a thickener, and it will turn a very unappealing shade of gray if cooked in a cast-iron pot.

Don't confuse coconut cream with cream of coconut. Coconut milk is high in saturated fat and can separate, forming a thick layer of cream on top. This cream is often stirred back into the can for a smooth, uniformly rich liquid. But if you want a more intense flavor, skim off and use only the cream. The term coconut cream can be confusing; it's also legitimately a thicker liquid made from combining coconut meat with less liquid, and this product can be used when a recipe calls for coconut cream. Do not, however, confuse coconut cream with a product called cream of coconut (Coco Lopez is one popular brand). Cream of coconut is a processed product made with coconut cream and lots of sugar. It isn't interchangeable with coconut milk or coconut cream and is best used for blender drinks.

Other ways to add coconut flavor include syrups and extracts. Coconut syrup, often used by bartenders and available in liquor stores, is excellent in place of simple syrup to moisten sponge cake layers. I like to add a bit to homemade caramel sauce, which I then spoon over macadamia nut ice cream.

Even coconut extract has a place in layering flavors in pastry work. It's delicious in French buttercreams or when used in place of vanilla extract in white or yellow cake layers. A friend of mine finishes limeade with a few drops of coconut extract for an instant taste of Tahiti. Just remember to use it sparingly: it can leave a chemical aftertaste if used too heavily.

Coconut pairs well with more than just tropical flavors

Tropical flavors are an obvious match for coconut: mangos, papayas, and strawberries brighten rich coconut custards, while coconut ice cream or sorbet is perfect with grilled pineapples or banana fritters. As any fan of Mounds candy bars will tell you, coconut and chocolate, especially bittersweet chocolate, are perfect together. Coconut also responds to the warmth of ginger and cardamom and the toasty notes of walnuts, macadamias, and almonds.

And even when I've spent all day making coconut desserts, I'll still crave a spicy Thai curry, its heat tempered with coconut milk, or some crisp, coconut-crusted fried shrimp. But those recipes belong in another story about coconut—the savory one—and that's a good story, too.

RECIPES

Coconut Crème Brûlée

Cornstarch keeps the *crème brûlée* from separating, allowing you to make the custard up to two days before serving it. This dessert is wonderful served with



A small ice-cream scoop makes perfect mounds of macaroons. You can set the mounds close together; they won't spread.



The coconut gets toasted during baking; its nutty flavor and drier texture counter the cookie's sweet, moist interior.

a compote of starfruit, papaya, pineapple, and strawberries. *Serves four.*

1/3 cup sugar
1 tsp. cornstarch
8 large egg yolks
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 can (13½ to 14 oz.) coconut milk
4 tsp. fine raw sugar or granulated sugar for caramelizing

Heat the oven to 300°F. Sift the sugar and cornstarch together into a medium bowl. Whisk in the egg yolks. Whisk in the cream and coconut milk until blended. Pour the mixture through a fine strainer and into a large measuring cup with a pouring spout.

Set four 6-oz. ramekins in a deep baking dish or roasting pan. Divide the custard evenly among the ramekins. Set the pan on the middle rack of the oven. Carefully pour hot water into the pan until it comes halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Bake for 30 min. and then tent the pan loosely with foil (if it's tight, the custard will curdle) and bake until the centers of the



A piña colada sorbet offers a taste of summer in any season.

custard shudder gently when the ramekins are tapped, another 25 min. (start checking at 20 min.).

Remove the pan from the oven. Remove the ramekins from the water bath and cool slightly before refrigerating several hours or overnight.

Just before serving, sprinkle each custard with a thin layer of fine sugar, about 1 tsp. per custard. Caramelize the sugar by using either of the methods described below (and shown on p. 66).

For the torch method—Use a slow, sweeping motion to guide the flame directly on the surface of the custard; the nozzle should be 2 to 3 inches from the surface so the flame just licks the sugar. The topping is done when the entire surface is a glossy brown.

For the broiler method—Position the oven rack so the custards will be 2 to 3 inches from the broiler, and heat the broiler. Return the ramekins to the baking dish. Fill the dish with ice water almost to the top of the custards. Position the pan under the heat source. The sugar should begin to caramelize in 3 to 4 min.; watch carefully so they don't burn.

Coconut Macaroons

Bake the cookies right away once they're scooped onto the baking sheet to preserve their nice rounded shape. *Yields 4 dozen cookies.*

¾ cup egg whites, from about 5 large eggs
1½ cups plus 1 Tbs. sugar
12 oz. unsweetened finely shredded coconut

Line two heavy baking sheets with kitchen parchment. Heat the oven to 350°F. Adjust the racks to the center and upper portions of the oven. Thoroughly whisk together the egg whites and sugar. Work the coconut into the egg mixture by hand or with a

wooden spoon until completely incorporated. Scoop the coconut mixture onto the pans by packed, level tablespoons or with a ½-oz. ice-cream scoop. These cookies don't spread so they can be spaced fairly close together. Bake until the cookies are an even golden color and look dry (not at all sticky or wet looking), about 25 min. Halfway through baking, switch the pans from top to bottom and rotate them from back to front to ensure that the cookies color evenly.

Piña Colada Sorbet

Freezing dulls flavor, so the coconut syrup should have an intense taste. *Yields 1 quart.*

3 cups unsweetened pineapple juice
1 can (13½ to 14 oz.) coconut milk
1 cup sugar
2 Tbs. dark rum

Pour the pineapple juice into a medium bowl. In a 3-qt. nonreactive saucepan, combine 1 cup of the coconut milk with the sugar. Bring to a boil, stirring to be sure the sugar is incorporated. Boil until reduced by half, about 5 min. Add the remaining coconut milk and boil for another 5 min.; the mixture will turn a brownish color. Whisk the mixture into the pineapple juice and then add the dark rum. Chill, stirring occasionally, and then freeze in an ice-cream machine according to the manufacturer's directions.

If you don't have an ice-cream machine, you can make a granita, which will have a coarser texture but will still be refreshing and delicious. Simply freeze the mixture in the freezer, stirring it vigorously with a fork every half hour or so for a few hours, to ensure that the coconut syrup doesn't separate.

Sour Cream Chocolate Cake with Coconut Frosting

Baking the layers at 300°F keeps the cake exceptionally moist. Serve it at room temperature; the coconut softens when refrigerated. *Serves twelve to sixteen.*

FOR THE CAKE:

¾ cup cocoa powder (I use Hershey's)
1½ cups boiling water
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into six pieces
¾ cup sour cream
3 large eggs
1 tsp. vanilla extract
12 oz. (3 cups) cake flour
3 cups sugar
2¼ tsp. baking soda
1½ tsp. salt

FOR THE BUTTERCREAM FROSTING:

6 large egg yolks
1 cup sugar
½ cup coconut milk
1 to 2 tsp. coconut extract (or to taste)
1 lb. unsalted butter, cut into tablespoons, softened (but not at all melted)
4 cups large shaved coconut (fresh or desiccated), toasted

To make the cake—Heat the oven to 300°F. Line the bottoms of two 9-inch cake pans with kitchen parchment and set them aside (there's no need to grease the pans).

Making classic buttercream frosting with a coconut twist



Cook the coconut milk and sugar to the soft-ball stage, 238°F on a candy thermometer.



Avoid a sticky mess by stopping and starting the beaters as you add the hot sugar syrup to the egg yolks.



Adding the butter a little at a time helps it blend well. Be sure the mixture is cool or the butter will melt.

Put the cocoa powder in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Pour the boiling water over the cocoa and whisk until smooth. Add the butter and sour cream and blend on low speed until the butter melts. Allow the mixture to cool for a minute if still very hot, and then add the eggs and vanilla and whisk until smooth. Cool for 10 min.

Meanwhile, sift together the cake flour, sugar, baking soda, and salt. With the mixer on low speed, add the dry ingredients a little at a time to the butter mixture, scraping down the sides once or twice. Increase the speed to medium and blend for another 3 min.

Pour the batter into the prepared pans and bake until the center of the cake feels firm and the cake just barely begins to pull away from the sides of the pan, 50 min. to 1 hour (begin checking after 45 min.). Remove the cakes from the oven and let cool completely before frosting.

To make the frosting—Put the yolks in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a whisk attachment.

In a small saucepan, combine the sugar and coconut milk. Stir to combine and then bring to a boil. As the mixture heats, begin whipping the eggs on high speed. Boil the coconut milk and sugar until the mixture reaches the soft-ball stage (238°F on a candy thermometer). Remove the mixture from the heat. Stop the mixer and pour a small amount of the syrup into the egg yolks. Quickly beat on high again. Repeat twice more until all the syrup is incorporated. (You can also add the sugar syrup in a steady stream with the mixer on, but be careful not to let it hit the beater or the syrup will be flung to the sides of the bowl where it will harden.) Continue beating until the mixture is cool.

Add the coconut extract. With the mixer on medium speed, begin beating in the butter 1 or 2 Tbs. at a time. When the butter is completely incorporated, scrape down the sides of the bowl and beat another 1 min.

Use the frosting right away to fill and frost the cooled cake or cover tightly and refrigerate until ready



to use. (Bring chilled buttercream to room temperature before using, beating briefly to smooth it, if necessary.) Pat on a generous coating of the shaved toasted coconut over the sides and top and, if you like, between the layers.

Scrape down the beater and the sides of the bowl and briefly beat the frosting again.

Kay Cabrera lives in Waikoloa, where she works as a freelance pastry chef for area caterers and restaurants. Before freelancing, she was a pastry chef at the Gallery Restaurant at the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel on the Gold Coast of the Big Island. ♦

Getting the most from a pinch of saffron

Saffron could be described as the prima donna of the spice cabinet. For starters, it's the most expensive spice (by weight) in the world. In addition, it requires special treatment to fully extract its unique flowery, pungent, almost bitter character and deep orange color that make it indispensable in bouillabaisse, paella, and a host of other traditional dishes.

Saffron's high cost is due to the fact that the threads are

the actual stigma of a particular crocus flower and must be harvested by hand. Fortunately, a little bit of saffron goes a long way. In fact, too much saffron can ruin a dish with an overpowering, medicinal taste. So in practice, saffron actually costs not much more than most seasonings.

When shopping for saffron, look for evenly colored, vivid red or deep orange threads. Lighter colored

threads or a lot of pale streaks indicate lesser quality. Avoid powdered saffron, which is always cheaper but often inferior and adulterated with other flavorings.

Crush and soak saffron to release its flavor. Saffron

threads are quite frail and can easily be crumbled between your fingers, although for a more uniform powder, use a



Pie pans vs. tart pans

The difference between a pie pan and a tart pan is more than simple semantics. A pie pan, often called a pie plate, pie dish, or pie tin, is a round, shallow, slope-sided dish with a flat or fluted rim to hold the edge of a pie crust. While the most popular American pie pan is made of Pyrex glass, pans made of aluminum, tin, heavy black steel, and fired clay are also available. Most pie pans are one piece, although some steel pie pans have removable bottoms.

A standard pie pan is 9 inches in diameter and 1¼ inches deep. There are 9½- and 10-inch pans, as well as small (4½-inch) individual pie pans; it's important to read your recipe for the right size. (Measure across the inside rim.) Deep-dish pie pans are 1½ to 2 inches deep.

The main difference between a tart pan and a pie pan is the shape and depth of the sides. A tart pan has straight sides (some fluted, some not) that turn out neat, more "professional" looking pastries than the slope-sided pie pans. Most tart pans are made of metal, and the best have a removable bottom, allowing you to slip off the outer ring without marring the beautiful crust.

Unlike pie pans, tart pans come in an endless variety of shapes and sizes. They may be round or rectangular, and they range from 4 to 12 inches across and from ¾ to 2 inches deep. (Smaller than 4 inches would be a tartlet pan.)

In place of a tart pan, some bakers use a tart ring, also called a flan ring (below, far left).



Pie pans

Tart pans

This thin metal circle (½ to 1 inch deep and in varying diameters) sits directly on a baking sheet, resulting in a much crisper bottom crust. Rings are especially good for savory tarts without a lot of sugar in the crust (a sweet crust will brown during baking no matter how it's formed).

Round tart pans are also sometimes referred to as quiche pans. With their upright sides, you get more filling into

the shell and a neater, more regular slice of quiche when serving. Quiche is also sometimes baked in a ceramic or fired clay pan that resembles a tart pan but that doesn't have a removable bottom (above, second from left). While it's slightly more difficult to get the first slice of quiche out of one of these pans, some bakers believe the material (especially if unglazed) bakes superior crusts. These pans double as serving dishes.

mortar and pestle. Measure (or count) saffron threads before crushing. A “pinch” is about 20 medium saffron threads.

Saffron needs moisture to release its flavor. The best way to extract flavor from saffron is to soak the threads in hot (not boiling) liquid for 5 to 20 minutes. Then add both the saffron and the liquid to the recipe. As the saffron soaks, you’ll notice the distinctive aroma indicating that your saffron “tea” is ready. I like to soak the saffron in stock or wine (rather than water) to add to the overall flavor of a dish.

When adding saffron to soups, stews, salad dressings, and other recipes with a lot of liquid, you can simply toss the crushed threads in with the rest of the ingredients. I still find, however, that I get a deeper, more pervasive saffron flavor by first soaking the crushed threads and then adding them. For traditional paella recipes, cooks first toast the saffron threads in a dry skillet to bring out the volatile flavors. I don’t usually bother because I’ve found that this step makes little difference in the final flavor of the dish.

Put color and shine on pastry crust with an egg wash

Just before sliding puff pastry, *pâte à choux*, a double-crust pie, or a loaf of bread into the oven, most bakers brush the top of the pastry with an egg wash. The term *egg wash* simply means an egg, or a part of an egg, that has been thinned with a bit of water, milk, or cream and is used to promote browning or to create a glossy shine, or both. How brown or shiny the crust becomes depends on the makeup of the egg wash (see the chart, right).

The protein and fat in an egg cause different effects. Protein promotes browning, while the fat in the yolk gives crusts a nice shine. Since there is protein in both the yolk and the white, any whole egg or yolk will make the crust both shiny and brown. The white, on the other hand, will only promote browning without contributing any significant gloss to the crust.

Egg washes may contain water, milk, or cream, and sometimes salt. Since the best-looking pastries are made by applying a thin, even coat of egg wash, adding a little liquid (1 tablespoon per egg, or ½ tablespoon per yolk or white) will help thin it and make it easier to brush.

Besides diluting the egg, milk or cream will also affect the final appearance. Since milk is mostly protein, it will increase the browning when added to an egg yolk. Milk has little effect when added to whites or whole eggs since the protein content is already relatively high. Cream, on the other hand will increase the gloss of the crust because of its high fat content.

Some chefs like to add salt (a scant ⅛ teaspoon per egg) to an egg wash because it breaks down the proteins and thins the white, making it easier to

brush on. Keep in mind that you must wait a minute or two for the salt to become effective.

The best tool for applying an egg wash is a natural bristle pastry brush. Keep it clean by washing it immediately after use; don’t let egg dry in the bristles. When applying an egg wash to puff pastry or other flaky dough that’s meant to rise in the oven, be careful not to let the glaze run over the

sides or it will, in effect, glue the flaky layers together and prevent them from rising.

Likewise, if you’re planning to score the surface of a loaf of bread or pastry, first brush on the egg wash, and then score the dough so the egg wash doesn’t drip into the score marks and seal them closed.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦



CUSTOMIZE EGG WASHES FOR VARIED EFFECTS

Content of egg wash	Effect on cooked pastry
whole egg with water	nicely browned, slightly glossy
whole egg with milk	nicely browned, more glossy
egg white only	evenly browned, slightly less brown than whole egg, very little shine
egg yolk only or egg yolk with water	browned and shiny, but less so than yolks with cream or milk
egg yolk with cream	very browned and glossy, but a relatively thick egg wash that’s somewhat difficult to spread neatly
egg yolk with milk	the darkest brown crust and a touch less shiny than yolk with cream

Cooking Dried Beans, Peas & Lentils

Legumes are a truly ancient food. It's thought that lentils were cultivated as far back as 7000 B.C. The legume family includes beans, peas, peanuts, and lentils. Its members are excellent sources of protein, fiber, and minerals; combined with grains, legumes are a staple food for many cultures.

Legumes are packed with nutrients. Per serving, they have twice as much protein as cereals (legume and cereal combinations, like beans and rice, complement one another to provide many essential amino acids). With the exception of soybeans and peanuts, most legumes are very low in fat. Their high fiber and soluble fiber content can help reduce cholesterol levels and help stabilize blood sugar levels, making you feel "full" longer. In addition, legumes are high in vitamins B and E, calcium, potassium, and iron.

While many legumes contain small amounts of toxins—lima beans contain cyanide, for example, and dried beans contain lectins—cooking destroys these compounds, making the beans harmless. Cooking also gets rid of enzymes known as protease inhibitors, which would otherwise prevent us from digesting proteins.

Legumes present cooks with a few pressing questions: must we soak them? why do they sometimes never seem to get tender? and how can we



Salt aids softening.

A good soak in salted water can fix a hard-to-cook batch of beans.

Sugar inhibits softening,

so adding a sugar such as molasses to long-cooking beans prevents mushiness.

Acids prevent softening.

Add acidic ingredients like tomato sauce once the beans are tender.

eliminate, or at least reduce, their less flattering side effects?

Soaking helps soften them up

Though they vary considerably in size and shape, all legumes have essentially the same structure. They are all seeds, which consist of two

halves, called cotyledons, that are the starch storage centers for the young seedling. When they're immature, legumes are tender enough to be eaten with minimal cooking. But once they've been preserved by drying, legumes benefit from some sort of preliminary soaking or rehydra-

tion to soften them before cooking. The most common way to soften dried beans is by soaking them in room-temperature water for several hours or overnight. Water initially enters the bean through the hilum, or scar, where the bean was attached

More than simple flavor enhancers, salt, sugar, and acids can either help or hinder cooking.

to the stem in the pod. Only after some water has been absorbed by the seed through this small opening will water start soaking through the seed coat. Legumes with thinner coatings, such as lentils or split peas, will soften faster than those with thicker membranes.

Some beans refuse to soften. You can soak them overnight and then simmer them all day long, and they're still hard as pebbles. The main causes of this are age and improper storage. If beans have been stored at high temperatures (around 100°F) and high humidity (80%), chemi-

The warmer the water, the faster the bean absorbs it. This principle has led to the "quick-soak" method of softening. Rinse the beans several times and discard any "floaters." Then, in a large pot, cover the beans with 4 cups of water for each cup of beans. Bring the water to a boil, reduce the heat and keep at a low simmer for 2 to 10 minutes. Turn off the heat, cover, and let stand for an hour. You could also heat the beans and water together in the microwave until the water is boiling and then let them soak for about 1½ hours.

Some beans refuse to soften. You can soak them overnight and then simmer them all day long, and they're still hard as pebbles. The main causes of this are age and improper storage. If beans have been stored at high temperatures (around 100°F) and high humidity (80%), chemi-

cal changes occur that make them almost impossible to soften. You can often avoid this situation by keeping dried beans in an airtight container and a cool place.

Salt can help counter the hard-to-cook phenomenon. You may have heard the myth that salt hampers beans' ability to soften. I don't know how this rumor started, but it isn't true. The fact is that soaking beans in salted water before cooking can help rectify the hard-to-cook situation. The next time you have a recalcitrant batch of beans, try soaking them in salted water (1 tablespoon salt per gallon of water) for 2 hours.

Salting beans early is actually a good idea for other reasons. I add sea salt to beans at the beginning of cooking as a flavor enhancer, along with bay leaves, thyme, ham hocks, or salt pork. Salt and other seasonings can diminish the "beany" taste that some people object to.

Calcium, sugar, and acidic ingredients inhibit softening

Though salt isn't one of them, there are certain ingredients that can prevent beans from softening. Normally when fruits and vegetables are cooked, heat causes the insoluble pectic substances (the "glue" between the cells) to convert to water-soluble pectins, which dissolve. The cells then separate and the fruit or vegetable softens. Both calcium and sugar, however, hinder this conversion to pectin, so when beans are cooked with an ingredient containing these substances, such as molasses, the beans won't get overly

soft. That's why Boston baked beans can be cooked for hours and still retain their shape. If you cooked the same beans without the molasses, you would have "refried" beans (bean mush). Cooking beans in "hard" water, which contains calcium, also prevents softening.

Acidic ingredients prevent softening, but in a different way. While calcium and sugar prevent cells from coming apart, the starch that's inside the cells can still swell and soften, so the beans will be tender. But acids work differently, acting on starch within cells, preventing it

from swelling. So don't add acidic ingredients, such as tomato sauce, wine, lemon juice, or vinegar, until the beans are tender.

Minimizing the flatulence factor

Legumes get a bad rap for their tendency to cause flatulence. One of the causes of this sometimes embarrassing situation is the large sugars, called oligosaccharides. Our bodies can't digest these sugars, so they pass untouched through our digestive system until bacteria in the lower intestine devour them, and in the process produce quantities of gas. The amount of gas produced varies greatly among individuals, depending on the bacteria in their intestines. And some varieties of beans seem to produce more gas than others, such as navy and Great Northern, even though they don't have higher oligosaccharide contents. This suggests that other compounds in legumes contribute to gas, too. This is an area that's still not thoroughly understood.

Rinsing beans will help. Luckily, oligosaccharides are water soluble, so rinsing the beans several times in fresh water is a help in reducing gas. The "quick-soak" method of softening mentioned earlier also helps. There are enzyme products intended to break down the oligosaccharides and reduce gas, although whether they're effective may depend on the individual.

Shirley O. Corriher, a food scientist, wrote the award-winning CookWise (William Morrow). She is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

How long to cook dried beans on the stovetop

In general, you should have 3 to 4 cups of water for each 1 cup of beans. Count on getting 2 to 2½ cups of cooked beans for every cup of dried beans. Below are approximate times for conventional stovetop cooking.

	condition	water	cooking time
adzuki	unsoaked	4 cups	90 minutes
	soaked	4 cups	60 minutes
black (turtle)	soaked	4 cups	90 minutes
black-eyed	soaked	3 cups	60 minutes
chickpeas	soaked	4 cups	2 to 3 hours
Great Northern	soaked	3 cups	90 minutes
kidneys	soaked	3 cups	60 minutes
lentils	unsoaked	3 cups	60 to 90 minutes
	soaked	3 cups	45 minutes
lima	soaked	3 cups	60 minutes
navy	soaked	3 cups	60 minutes
pinto	soaked	3 cups	2 to 2½ hours
soy	soaked	4 cups	3 to 4 hours
split peas	soaked	3 cups	45 minutes

How to adjust the timing for other cooking methods

pressure cooker
(use about 2½ cups of water per cup of beans)

soaked: 20 to 30 minutes
unsoaked: 40 to 50 minutes

crockpot
unsoaked: 12 hours on low

microwave
soaked: 50 minutes



Dried Porcini Add Earthy Flavor

Porcini mushrooms have two lives. They enter this world first—and fleetingly—as sizable, fleshy fungi with spongy caps and thick, meaty stems, looking rather like heavily padded umbrellas.

Extremely perishable, porcini that aren't sold fresh are often dried. In this second incarnation, they don't look as impressive—they're shriveled slices of their former selves. But don't be fooled: even in this state, they have a rich, woodsy aroma that signals their concentrated flavor and rich culinary potential. While fresh porcini make for delicately earthy, luxurious eating, reconstituted dried porcini have a deeper, smokier personality and a chewier texture, and they're used as a flavoring rather than as a vegetable.

Picking porcini by sight

Dried porcini are much easier to find than fresh. You can buy them at many supermarkets, in gourmet groceries, and by mail (see Sources, p. 76). They're pricey (about \$5 per ½ ounce) but, like other potent flavorings, a little goes a long way.

Quality can vary. Because porcini are most often sold in cellophane, you have to judge them by their looks. If you can smell them, check that they smell woodsy and earthy, not

musty or medicinal. Be sure the label says porcini (or *cèpes*, their French name, or the Latin *Boletus edulis*). Generically named “dried mushrooms” will be just that: an unnamed variety (or varieties) that's pallid in flavor compared to real porcini.

In general, darker color means more intense flavor. I look for large, intact, beige pieces; their more delicate flavor is more to my taste. Extremely dark porcini may be older and unpleasantly strong. Whether light or dark, a uniform color is a good sign.

Look for a lot of caps. I like to see more arc-shaped cap pieces than rectangular stems. The stems are equally flavorful, but their ends can be tough and encrusted with dirt, requiring a quick trim (which is easier to do after they've been rehydrated). Finally, the best porcini should be free of the rough texture and pinholes made by insects. Store dried porcini in a cool, dry place in a closed container.

Use the “liquid gold” you get from soaking

Dried porcini are most often rehydrated before use. I use

about a cup of warm water per ounce of porcini and let them soak until tender, usually about 30 minutes. The dark-brown liquid that results has more flavor than the porcini themselves. Strain it through moistened cheesecloth or just pour it off carefully, discarding the sediment in the bowl. Use this potent porcini “liquor” to enrich a vegetable broth or soup, a stew or risotto, or as the basis of a sauce. But be careful: too much of this liquid can overwhelm your dish. (You can dilute its flavor by starting with more soaking water.)

Give the rehydrated porcini a final rinse in clean water to get rid of any stubborn grit. After rinsing, I drain the porcini on a double layer of paper towels, cover with another sheet, and pat them dry.

I love to add porcini, first sautéed in olive oil or butter and seasoned with salt and pepper, to a simmering tomato sauce. They contribute great texture as well as a subtle

flavor. I usually add some of the soaking liquid as well.

Try porcini oil and “dust”

Porcini oil is a wonderful condiment that can turn a simple piece of fish or chicken into a gourmet dinner. Simply simmer rehydrated porcini in olive oil and a little salt for about 15 minutes to lightly infuse the oil; purée the mixture in a blender or a food processor, and store it in the fridge. Its flavor will build over the course of a few days and it will last at least a month. You can use the oil only or mix the solids and the oil together for a fuller flavor. Then spoon the redolent, woodsy oil over cooked fish or meat.

Make porcini powder by whirring dried (not rehydrated) porcini in a food processor or blender. Mix a little of this “dust” into a biscuit or bread dough, or dredge veal or chicken cutlets or fillets of sole or halibut in it before sautéing to impart a subtle, earthy flavor. Top the cooked meat or fish with some porcini oil for even more porcini flavor.

Leslie Revsin wrote *Great Fish, Quick (Doubleday)*. ♦

Experiment with dried porcini

- ♦ Sauté chopped garlic, parsley, fresh sage, and lemon zest together in olive oil with coarsely chopped rehydrated porcini and spoon over chicken, veal, pork, or fish fillets.
- ♦ Sauté rehydrated porcini with other mushrooms and serve on grilled bread under a blanket of melted fontina or mozzarella.
- ♦ Stir rehydrated porcini into soft polenta with finely diced, cooked onions, carrots, and fennel or spoon the mixture on top of sautéed polenta squares with shavings of *parmigiano reggiano*.
- ♦ Top grilled fish with porcini oil and diced tomatoes and serve garnished with fresh basil.
- ♦ Cook sliced or diced potatoes in porcini soaking water (extended with more water as necessary), toss with porcini oil, crumbled goat cheese, and fresh chives.

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Food Science

To learn more about cooking dried beans, call the **American Dry Bean Board** at 308/632-8239.

Flavorings

Dried porcini are available at most specialty food stores and many supermarkets. Or try one of the following mail-order sources: **D'Artagnan** (800/327-8246 or www.dartagnan.com), \$4 per 1-oz. package; **Boscovivo USA** (877/827-8836 or www.boscovivo.com), \$10 per 2-oz. package; or **Urbani** (800/281-2330 or www.urbanicom.com), \$8 per 2-oz. package.

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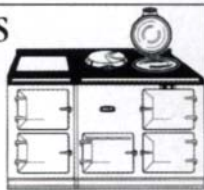
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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Beef Bourguignon	30	920	510	74	18	57	22	26	4	260	940	2	based on 10 servings
Spaetzle	31	250	110	9	25	12	6	4	1	185	220	1	based on 12 servings
Orecchiette with Broccoli & Sausage	35	540	220	20	59	25	7	13	2	35	690	6	
Stir-Fried Broccoli with Oyster Sauce	35	120	80	4	8	9	1	4	3	0	90	4	based on 4 servings
Broccoli with Bagna Cauda	36	200	150	5	9	17	4	11	2	10	180	4	
Broccoli & Herb Frittata	37	240	150	16	7	17	7	7	2	285	580	3	
Goat Cheese & Olives Marinated in Oil	41	530	490	11	2	54	14	34	4	25	490	0	
Rice Pudding with Bay Leaves	41	290	120	7	38	13	8	4	1	50	140	1	based on 6 servings
Pork Chops Marinated with Bay Leaves	41	290	220	16	1	25	7	14	2	60	340	1	
Fettuccine with Asparagus & Lemon	44	1040	520	39	96	57	29	16	10	195	770	13	
Cavatappi with Roasted Peppers	45	1080	520	35	106	57	32	18	3	190	780	9	
Baked Ziti with Tomato & Sausage	46	1070	390	54	113	44	20	17	5	110	1140	8	
Cold Sesame Noodles	49	360	240	8	23	27	3	10	7	15	730	4	based on 10 servings
Caramelized Pineapple Clafoutis	52	330	180	5	31	20	12	6	1	165	45	1	
Clafoutis with Prunes & Armagnac	52	290	130	5	34	15	8	5	1	145	50	2	
Pear Clafoutis with Almonds	52	260	130	6	25	15	7	5	1	140	45	2	
Couscous with Lamb & Vegetables	56	930	350	28	122	39	7	26	4	40	1040	12	based on 10 servings
Coconut Crème Brûlée	67	490	370	8	26	42	28	8	2	465	40	1	
Coconut Macaroons	68	50	20	1	8	2.5	2.0	0	0	0	10	1	per cookie
Piña Colada Sorbet	68	250	90	1	39	10	9	0	0	0	5	1	per ½ cup
Sour Cream Chocolate Cake w/Frosting	68	660	410	5	63	46	30	11	2	210	430	3	per ⅓ cake
Arroz con Pollo	82	750	230	36	84	26	7	13	4	110	650	3	per ¼ recipe

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

A Chicken & Rice Dish Destined to Become a Favorite

It was my Cuban hairdresser who turned me on to making *arroz con pollo*, the terrifically satisfying chicken and rice dish that exists in various incarnations throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. The next thing I knew, I was devouring it nearly every night for dinner. It requires practically no planning because, except for the chicken and sausage, everything I need is usually right in my pantry. But the real reason I make *arroz con pollo* so often is that it's hit-the-spot good. As the rice cooks, it grabs a ton of flavor from its companions in the pot: the chicken, sausage, cumin, paprika, bell pepper, garlic, and tomatoes.

Arroz con pollo (ah-ROHS kohn POY-oh) is extremely straightforward to make and to clean up. The most time-consuming step—browning the chicken—can be abbrevi-

ated by cutting the thighs in half so they'll cook faster (a trick I also use for *paella*, the Iberian cousin of *arroz con pollo*). Another time-saver is to cheat on the *mise en place*. Get the meat browning right away and then start chopping the onion, bell pepper, and garlic. It takes about 25 minutes to get everything into the pot, and then as it cooks you have another 20 minutes to do whatever you want: wash the few dishes you've used, assemble a salad, answer e-mail.

Depending on the size and thickness of your pot, the rice may take more or less time to cook. If there's a lot of liquid left in the pot when the rice is done, remove the cover and simmer gently until the liquid boils off. If just a small amount of liquid remains when the rice is done, turn off the heat and let the rice rest, still covered, for 5 or 10 minutes. In that

time, the rice will absorb the remaining moisture. This rest will also make the flavors become more robust.

Perhaps the best thing about *arroz con pollo* is the leftovers. The amount of rice in this recipe can stretch to accommodate more chicken, so I sometimes throw in another half-pound of parts just to be sure I'll have enough for a hearty lunch the next day.

Arroz Con Pollo

I like to pair the sweet Italian sausage with wine and the hot sausage with beer. I also like the way turmeric colors the rice, but it's fine to omit it. *Serves four, with leftovers.*

2 Tbs. olive oil; more as needed

1½ lb. chicken parts, patted dry and liberally seasoned with coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ to 1 lb. sweet or hot Italian sausage, cut in 2-inch pieces

1 small onion, chopped
1 medium green or red bell pepper, cut in ½-inch dice
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. ground cumin
¼ tsp. paprika
¼ tsp. chili powder
½ tsp. ground turmeric (optional)
½ cup peeled, crushed tomatoes (I use canned)
½ cup dry white wine or beer
1 bay leaf
2 cups medium-grain rice (I use Goya)
2¼ cups water

In a deep, heavy-based pot (such as a Dutch oven), heat the oil on medium high. Sauté the chicken, in batches if necessary, until golden on all sides, 7 to 10 min. Transfer the chicken to a platter. Sauté the sausage until browned, about 3 min. Transfer the sausage to the platter. Pour off and discard the excess oil, leaving about 1 Tbs. in the pan.

Reduce the heat to medium and sauté the onion, pepper, and garlic until softened, about 5 min. Return the chicken and sausage to the pot and add the cumin, paprika, chili powder, and turmeric, if using, stirring to distribute the spices. Cook for 1 min. and then add the tomatoes, wine (or beer), and bay leaf. Increase the heat to medium high, stir, and cook for 2 min. Add the rice and water. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce the heat to a simmer. Cook until the rice is done and the liquid is absorbed, about 25 min. (If the rice is done but still very soupy, remove the cover and cook very gently until the liquid evaporates, taking care not to burn the rice.) Give a toss and then let sit for 5 min. before serving.

Sarah Jay is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦





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A Single Clove of Garlic Spawns Many More



The “seed” is a clove of garlic. Aaron plants in raised beds covered with newspaper, which keeps weeds at bay. (The ink on the paper is soybean based.)

Chester Aaron grows 87 varieties of garlic in the meadow adjoining his house in Occidental, California. The garlics originate from twenty different countries—places as far-flung as northern China,



Layers of wheat straw regulate the amount of moisture that goes into the garlic beds and also discourage weeds.

Czechoslovakia, and Louisiana—with names like Xi’An, Creole Red, and Russian Red Toch, which comes from the same Georgian village where Aaron’s father was born (“garlic was my destiny,” he says).

As for this allium’s purported health benefits, Aaron eats a good bit of it and admits that he hasn’t had a cold in 23 years. But he prefers to

tout the deliciously fresh pungency and the unique nuances of the different garlics he grows, some of which are extremely rare.

“Large-scale garlic farmers tell me they know my varieties would win against theirs in a taste-off, but they just can’t grow mine because the attention required is too labor intensive,” Aaron proudly says.

At harvest, Aaron picks the biggest, fattest, and healthiest bulbs of each variety to reserve for planting. To start next year’s crop, he’ll choose only unblemished, unbroken cloves from those bulbs.

After harvest in late June, Aaron hangs bundles of garlic to cure for three weeks.

The three months after curing is when garlic is at its best. At right is Beijing—mild and rich, with fat, thumb-sized cloves.